Winter 2-25-2018

# Perspectives and Expectations of Native Spanish-Speaking Parents about Their Children's Education in An American Elementary School

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# Perspectives and Expectations of Native Spanish-Speaking Parents about Their Children's Education in An American Elementary School

**A Dissertation Presented**

**By**

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Submitted to the Graduate School of Education

Lesley University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

November 2017

Ph.D. Educational Studies
Educational Leadership Specialization

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**Approvals**

*In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.*

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# DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother, Carol Rothwell, who passed away when I was thirteen and in my first year of junior high school. Her wish was for me to become a doctor, and though I am quite sure she meant a medical doctor, I believe that this work would nonetheless have made her proud. The lessons she taught me at an early age continue to guide my beliefs, values, and decisions. I miss her tremendously and am eternally grateful for her support, guidance, and love. Any achievements earned in my life are a result of the time I had with my mother throughout my formative years. I love her, and I miss her.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful that I have had the opportunity to work with a supportive group of advisors, supervisors, colleagues, family, and friends. They have played a critical role in helping to guide my thinking and learning. I am who I am and I believe what I believe because of their kindness, patience, and caring.

I have had the pleasure to work with a wonderful committee of educational and scholarly leaders. Dr. Paul Naso is a phenomenal senior advisor and committee chair. No one has played a greater role in both pushing my thinking and motivating me to continue to plow through obstacles to complete this work. His guidance and encouragement will be forever appreciated. Dr. Maria de Lordes Serpa, a Committee Member, brought a wealth of experience and knowledge working with English learners; she patiently helped me to understand, research, and, thus, experience these students and families in ways I cannot measure. Dr. Nadene Stein, a fellow former principal and now central office administrator and Committee Member, was always supportive, kind, and understanding, especially given our similar experiences in education.

My incredibly supportive family has been by my side as well as behind me every step of this journey. My wife, Karen, has endured many days and nights as a single parent, allowing me both time and space to think, write, and work. I am blessed to share my life with such a loving and supportive partner who is also my best friend. My caring, understanding, and supportive children, Emma and Jackson, have additionally shown tremendous patience, encouragement, and love. Finally, I am grateful to my dad and stepmother, who from across the country, have always made it a point to check-in and offer weekly words of inspiration and support.

My friends, colleagues, and the staff at the school where I work have also been extremely helpful. Dr. Sara Hamerla was instrumental in helping me to collect data and she helped translate and interpret throughout the interviews to get me over this huge linguistic hurdle. Phil Reitz was extremely helpful for his fine translation skills and willingness to help whenever possible; he is truly one of the nicest men I know. Ruthie Ortiz, Beth Delahunty, and Ellie Cowen deserve special thanks for their assistance with the administration of the questionnaire. Cynthia Page and Susan Schuler each have been wonderful colleagues and friends as they were always encouraging and willing to cover things at work in my absence. I am grateful to Inna London for her willingness to read and reread my work and suggest edits. Her guidance and assistance have helped me become a more confident writer. Lastly, this program allowed me to reconnect with Susan Sylvia whom I had not seen since we graduated from high school in 1987. Our "New Bedford" connection was a great motivator, and I am grateful for her support and encouragement.

I give special thanks to the members of the Lesley 2009 cohort and the professors with whom we had the benefit of working. Our diversified experiences have only helped me to understand better my own strengths and limitations in the world in which we live. Michael Hanna deserves special thanks as we have become close friends; I can only hope I was able to push him as much as he pushed me. I want to express my gratitude to the two communities that allowed me to administer my surveys and use their community members as participants for both the questionnaire and the interviews. Lastly and most importantly, I am thankful to the 38 participants who participated in this study and who trusted me by sharing their personal stories with me. Their lives, as immigrants, English learners, parents, and caregivers, and their journeys are a true inspiration to me, this work, and my professional work.

There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education.

—Justice William O. Douglas, *Lau v. Nichols, 1974*

Intelligence is a great leveler here as elsewhere.

—Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, 1881*

I try all things, I achieve what I can.

—Herman Melville, *The Whale, 1851*

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study inquired about the perceptions of Spanish-speaking immigrant parents about their children's experiences in a Massachusetts elementary school, the expectations they have for their children's education, and their understanding of their role with regards to their children's education. The phenomenological design and analysis concentrated on parents' lived experience as they and their families interacted with the school. Thirty-eight parents of English learners participated in answering a questionnaire and ten were later interviewed. Findings reveal that parents of English learners face obstacles in understanding American schooling and often rely on information from others and comparisons with their own previous school experiences. Parents understood the importance of their children acquiring English as a factor in acculturation to the United States and desired that their children be bilingual. Parents wished to acculturate into United States schools and they sought different ways to connect with the school and school personnel. Connectedness was influenced by how well they felt they and their children were treated and understood. Finally, they possessed an understanding that their status in the school community as immigrants, language learners, and newcomers signaled to others that they are different. Implications of this study include the need for educational leaders and policy makers to recognize that traditional methods of registering families, communicating with parents, and involving parents are insufficient for this population. Instead, new methods need to be considered, created, and implemented to engage with parents of English learners. Moreover, educators need to understand that it is the responsibility of the schools to encourage agency and advocacy for all parents to have a voice and to be partners if social justice is to be attained.


*Keywords:* parent involvement, engagement, English learners, parents of English learners

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# CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

I am the principal of an elementary school in which over 40% of the enrolled students are English learners[1] (ELs), approximately 60% of the students' families report that English is not the first language spoken in the home, over 70% of the families are low-income by state standards, over 10% are homeless as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act[2], and 72% fall into a state category of "high needs" who are identified as belonging to at least one of the following individual subgroups: students with disabilities, English learners (EL) and/or former English learners, or low-income students (eligible for free/reduced price school lunch) (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: Glossary of accountability terms, 2013). Our ELs are enrolled in one of two programs: (a) a Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) program where the content is taught in students' native language (Spanish) while students receive English Language Development (ELD) instruction to learn English; or (b) a Sheltered English

[1] In the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, the term, "English learner" replaces the term "limited English proficient" used in section 9101 of the ESEA, as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. In this dissertation, to align with the ESSA's nomenclature, "English learner" (EL) is used to refer to students learning English (see glossary and definition of terms). Please note, English language learner (ELL), when used in direct quotes, has not been changed and is interchangeable with English learner (EL).

[2] The McKinney-Vento Act is a United States federal law, which aims to protect homeless children and youth. The term "homeless children and youth"— (A) means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence …; and (B) includes—(i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement; (ii) children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings … (iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and (iv) migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii). (McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvement Act of 2001, 2002)

Immersion (SEI) program in which instruction is in English, and the content is sheltered to allow ELs access to the curriculum. SEI students also receive daily English Language Development (ELD) instruction.

I accepted this assignment seven years ago, knowing I was to lead a school showcasing among the lowest state test scores of the eight elementary schools in the district. The results of these tests qualified the school as among the lowest performing 11% of schools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. My tenure as principal of this elementary school followed nineteen years as a high school teacher, department chair, and vice principal. The shift from working in high schools to leading an elementary school motivated me to become better acquainted with the laws, philosophies, program models and pedagogies relevant to elementary education, and, more specifically, to the education of English learners. I have acquired a wealth of information in over seven years about general practices of elementary education and the education of elementary-aged ELs, and this has provided me with significant guidance for leading the school.

The interaction of these varied demands creates a set of challenges that are difficult to navigate. It has become increasingly difficult to satisfy the different stakeholders whom schools and leaders aim to serve. Complicating matters further are political dimensions concerning the education of ELs; during the past nineteen years, some states have passed laws that have attempted to restrict native language instruction, and these state laws as well as the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 have led to reduced native language instruction and dramatically different educational experiences for ELs across Massachusetts and the nation. Critics maintain that these new laws have little grounding in research, and there are claims that these decisions have been driven by political and/or financial considerations or that they reflect a

particular cultural bent (Crawford, 2000). According to Crawford, "Research on second-language acquisition has increasingly showcased the academic benefits of bilingual instruction. Indeed, when language minority students fail, it is more likely from too little instruction in the native language than too little English" (p. 7).

There is extensive research on English learners from which a high volume of information can be gleaned. Across Massachusetts and the nation, however, there are differing political viewpoints and pressures that do not always align with the research, making it difficult for school leaders to make decisions. These sometimes opposing pressures are not helping to inform educational leaders while bilingual populations of students in the United States are growing at a record pace (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in the school year 2014/15 there were 4.6 million students who were English learners (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The population of English learners has more than doubled since 1990 when there were approximately two million ELs enrolled in K-12 schools in the United States. (Li & Edwards, 2010).

According to a variety of measures, these students display the greatest difficulty succeeding in schools. "ELLs in MA (Massachusetts) are the lowest performing subgroup in the state by every measure" (Mitchell, 2009, p. 1). This data includes state assessments (MCAS/PARCC), graduation rates, dropout rates, competency determination rates, and participation in special education statistics. English learners are part of a growing achievement gap: they tend to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds and status, they are disproportionately failing to meet state and local standards, and they display the highest drop-out rates in the nation. In addition, many of these students potentially bring with them complex characteristics that may affect their learning because schools are not yet adequately prepared to

address their needs. Sourcing the Massachusetts 2RTI Working Group of 2010, Serpa (2011) lists several characteristics, including that ELs: "Are at different levels of English Language Learning proficiency …. May be immigrants …. Come from a diversity of languages and cultures …. May have parents with levels of education ranging from university-educated to pre-literate …. (and) Are mostly 'school dependent learners'" (p. 7).

Discussions in the United States at the judicial, legislative, policy, and practical levels as to how best educate children from non-English speaking backgrounds are omnipresent. Missing in these debates are the voices of the parents and families of these students. Surely, in our democratic system, parents' thoughts, expectations, and wishes should play a more prominent role in the decisions about the educational experiences their children have. Emphasis on assessments and labels of proficiency seem to be more salient than the voices of families and their expectations concerning the education of their children.

There are many obstacles, ranging from hunger, homelessness, lack of transport to and from school, special needs, and parents who struggle to find ways to be involved that can affect learning. Many obstacles are omnipresent outside of school, and these can have a negative impact on a child's achievement and success in school. An achievement gap exists in our nation, which is closely associated with variables such as race and economic status. According to Faitar (2011), "the present achievement gap existent between African American, Hispanics and European American children in the United States is further leading to disparities in academic success and missed opportunities in various professional careers" (p. 2). It is important for educators to recognize these negative forces and to do all that is possible within the school to combat them in ensuring the success of all the students with whom we work both now and in the future.

## Sociocultural Perspective

Although in my own life experiences I have encountered poverty and lived in diverse communities, in my role in public education I recognize how easy it is to be inattentive to those who have low socio-economic means or who may have high needs on personal terms and how easy it is to regard students from various backgrounds as members of a subgroup who are "failing" or not reaching performance targets. Policy priorities may be obstacles impeding the recognition of these students and their families as individuals as well as obstacles preventing the representation of these families' perspectives from being fully represented in the deliberations about the educational needs of their children.

Because of my past and background, I have a level of empathy that drives my decision-making in a positive way for the benefit of all children. Racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, the poor, English learners, and other less advantaged groups may have obstacles to overcome if they are to be successful in our society. My profession, education, should and can work to overcome these obstacles; indeed, I believe very strongly the purpose of education is to act as the great equalizer. As Founding Father Thomas Jefferson believed: an educated populace was a pillar to our nation's freedom; in a letter to Littleton Waller Tazewell in 1805, Jefferson affirmed he was "Convinced that the people are the only safe depositories of their own liberty, and that they are not safe unless enlightened to a certain degree, I have looked on our present state of liberty as a short-lived possession unless the mass of the people could be informed to a certain degree" (Mapp Jr., 1991, p. 254). Yet, while many preach this concept, educational gaps amongst our high-needs populations seem to be growing, not closing.

One of the reasons I was willing to move from nineteen years working in high schools to elementary school was that I wanted to work on closing gaps with children's learning at an

earlier age. I state to my elementary colleagues many times throughout the school year, "If we do not figure out how to help this child and close the gaps in his/her learning, it will not close! This child will be behind his/her peers right up through the end of high school. He/she will not catch up unless we do something major to help him/her catch up!" I have had the benefit of seeing children on the back end of their public school experiences, and for children who are less literate and less numerate, it is an extremely difficult struggle and an uncertain journey. According to the World Literacy Foundation (2015) "The cost of illiteracy to the global economy is estimated at USD $1.2 trillion" (Duncan, p. 4). In the United States, the cost is estimated to be $362 billion each year. Students who go through school lacking literacy and numeracy are in danger of being a strain on – rather than contributors to - society.

Sadly, there are obstacles for some children which are omnipresent as early as their first day of school. I am struck by the wide gap that children already possess when they show up as kindergartners (Wang, 2008, p. 24), especially evident at our school where over half the population has Spanish as their dominant language at home. Reviewing United States Department of Education early childhood data, Wang (2008) found that "Hispanic children had the largest gap as compared to White children in measures of overall mathematics knowledge and skills, overall literacy knowledge and skills, and in the sub-measures of language and early reading skills" (p. 29). Many of these children are immigrants to this country, living in the neighborhoods with the lowest comparative incomes in town. They are bused into our school, ironically, located in the most affluent area of the town; the other half of the school draws from the neighborhood in which the school is located.

I think about these children frequently, most notably about the fact that they are being brought into a school on the – quite literally – "other" side of town. Children bear witness to a

lot from the bus ride, and I often wonder how they feel about it. I grew up outside of New Bedford, one of the poorest urban areas in the state, and I eventually attended the University of Massachusetts as an undergraduate. The move from New Bedford to attending university is still salient in my mind. I recall vividly being awestruck by the lifestyles of so many of my college classmates and how they simply had resources at their fingertips that I had never seen before. Are my students' experiences coming to elementary school as children of immigrants at all similar to my experience going from New Bedford to UMass? Or is it even more challenging and thus I should not even consider comparing the two? On the other hand, is it actually better for them as half of the school is made up of Spanish-dominant speakers and this may add a benefit of comfort? Do they feel as though they are treated fairly? Do they feel like full participants in the school? Do their parents feel as though there is equitable treatment? How do I best help these children at home to better prepare them for school and schooling? These and questions like these are part of my ongoing inquiry and what drives my work.

The teachers in our school often comment that too many of our students lack a "readiness to learn." Do these comments offer insight or is this revealing the faculty's own cultural biases? In Harlem, Geoffrey Canada has created a public school system that begins educating *parents* when they have a child in the womb; in other words, education is starting pre-birth (Tough, 2009). Is this "experiment" in Harlem the solution? Will educators get the results Canada intends to get by beginning with children prior to birth?

I hope he does, and yet I fear that if this new approach fails to bring forth results, our society may regress to discussions of the bell curve: the nativists and racists will have new fodder that may slow down efforts to close achievement gaps. Being relatively new to working with elementary-aged children and being new to a position of power working with English

learners, I recognize the complexity when considering the range of means needed to understand, advocate for, and serve these children. Still, giving children a high-quality education to offer them options for success drives my work, my practice, and my research interests.

I am sometimes flummoxed as to the most effective way to teach these students English and to give them the skills they will need to succeed in an American school and in the United States. However, I am willing to hold true to my values, to continue to research best practices, and to do all I can to help these and all the students in my school to succeed. *That* is my job, and I will do all that I can to execute it well. Giving children a high-quality education so that they will have options and succeed as they get older drives my work. Taking special care to help those who are disadvantaged, who already possess fewer opportunities than their peers, is what inspires me each and every day.

I chose the challenges in my role as a principal in an elementary school because I wanted to close gaps with children's learning at an earlier age. In my pursuit to integrate my insights into my work I strive for a level of empathy that drives my decision-making in a positive way for the benefit of all children. Immigrants, the poor, English learners, and other less advantaged groups have obstacles to overcome if they are to be successful in our society. My profession, education, should and can work to mitigate these obstacles. Like many other educators, I subscribe to the idea that education's purpose is to be the great equalizer. "Education is commonly perceived (in the United States) as a viable weapon against poverty and social inequality … beyond its value to individuals, education is the cornerstone of societal advancement" (Allen & Hood, 2000, p. 329). There is still much work to be done in terms of how education policymakers and practitioners regard low socio-economic children and their

families; after all, despite the frequency with which people espouse this position, the gaps seem to be growing, not closing.

## Statement of the Problem

English learners are the fastest growing population of students in America's schools (Genesee et al., 2005). In school year 2014-15 English learners made up an estimated 9.4 percent of public school students, an estimated 4.6 million students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). In 1990 there were an estimated two million students who were identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). "In 1990, 1 of every 20 public school children in grades K-12 was an English language learner, that is, a student who speaks English either not at all or with enough limitations that he or she cannot fully participate in mainstream English instruction … (by 2030) demographers estimate that it might be 1 in 4" (Li & Edwards, 2010, p. 16). With these growing numbers, there is a greater focus on the means of educating these students and the manner in which schools address the issues and obstacles ELs face to support their learning.

There is tremendous pressure on principals and school leaders to get ELs to "succeed" on state assessments and, more so, to do so quickly. ELs tend to be one of the lowest performing subgroups on state assessments, and there is research that suggests that until these students attain high levels of academic English proficiency they will statistically continue to perform at a low level (Uriarte et al., 2011). As a result, "the image most hold of LEP (limited English proficient) students is one of failure. Principals are concerned about the impact of ELs on their school's AYP (adequate yearly progress) scores; school personnel hold unrealistic expectations of the process of language acquisition and see their students as 'lacking' and 'failing'; the students

themselves perceive themselves as 'failing'; and parents year after year receive a notice that communicates to them that their child has 'failed' MCAS" (Uriarte et al., 2011, p. 4).

This pressure on school leaders is tangible and intensifying as schools receive adequate yearly progress (AYP) "report cards" that are public and reflect on the school. What is missing is school leaders' ability to widen attention from the one-dimensional focus on test scores to include the real human variables of the students' families as the more important variables. Policy leaders at the state and federal levels create this narrow focus and essentially define "proficient" in terms of a state assessment score, and by doing so, they fail to encompass the different facets of the learning experiences achieved by English learners. Schools, consequently, focus on the "problem" of their English learners' "failures." In this environment, how can schools be attentive to families' needs and preferences? How do parents interact in an environment where the state and school leaders are essentially telling them that their children's needs are a burden? How do parents interpret the way in which their children's needs are being framed and addressed? These are questions school leaders grapple with regularly.

Courtney Cazden (2012), discussing *A Framework for Social Justice in Education*, cites the work of political economist Nancy Fraser and points out how there are three dimensions to social justice that are needed in education: "redistribution (economic), recognition (cultural …), and representation (political)" (p. 181). Using categories delineated by Cazden, I am focusing on the dimensions of recognition and representation. She cites an example of how "educational justice (for Aboriginal students in Australia) … would require recognition and inclusion in the school curriculum of their histories, cultures, and knowledges" (2012, p. 182). This understanding of students' culture is imperative for schools to understand truly and meet fully the needs of students. Additionally, I argue that the voices of the families of ELs in our democratic

system are not only silent, but there are few deliberate efforts made by schools to invite these voices and include these perspectives within the system(s) that exist, thereby establishing a clear lack of representation. This is the system upon which school leaders rely to guide their decisions when it comes to program choices, staffing, and the distribution of resources. We are simply not attentive to this need for this particular parental representation.

This responsibility of full representation falls on the school(s). Lopez (2003) discusses the need for schools to engage parents as community organizers and to motivate involvement as said organizers do by focusing on issues that directly affect them (p. 3). She suggests bringing up nonacademic issues and giving parents a voice to express their concerns and resolve "these nonacademic issues (as they) are "winnable issues" that give people a sense of their own power to affect change" (p. 3). The theory is that if parents can get involved with these winnable endeavors, they will likely be more willing to participate and be engaged when more complicated issues may arise.

Given that research shows that it takes four to seven years to acquire academic English (Thomas & Collier, 1997) and that ELs' proficiency with academic English leads to very small gaps in proficiency in subject tests when compared to English proficient (EP) students as measured by the MCAS test, there seems to be an *understanding* "gap" as to what could realistically be deemed "successful" for an English learner who has yet to achieve academic proficiency in English. There also seems to be a significant gap of understanding that exists between what policymakers deem proficient and what parents and families may desire for their children's education. Perhaps a way to begin attending respectfully and inquiring intently to decrease this lack of understanding is to grant the parents of these children a representative voice, to listen to the sense parents make of their children's experiences, and to hear what it is

that they expect from schools. This will be a positive step in better understanding how parents contribute to their children's education and learning, namely, to inquire what they want for their education.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of parents'[3] of English learners about their elementary-aged children's schooling, the expectations they have for their children's education, and their understanding of their role with regards to the education of their children. This study will help inform policy decision makers and school leaders to meet the needs of children that fall into this category. It will also explore the relationship parents have with the school and with their child's education. The study recognizes the need to glean more information from parents and to hear parents' perspectives about the challenges their children encounter as they become proficient in English and meet academic performance expectations. The study is focused on a specific population: Spanish-speaking parents of children enrolled in a program for English learners in an elementary school in the United States.

Specifically, I seek to understand what parents' hopes and dreams are for their children and how parents engage with their child's educational experiences both at school and at home. I want to learn how parents of English learners make sense of this milieu to which they and their children are bonded by geography and fate. By assembling this information, I hope to learn from parents what school leaders need to know in order to serve the educational needs of their children. By capturing parents' ideas, I intend to highlight and broadcast their thoughts to educators and educational leaders.

[3] For the purpose of this research, "parent" or "parents" refers to a child's primary caregiver and does not necessarily refer to a child's biological or legal parent.

My own thoughts regarding students' growth and achievement in school raise questions that lead me to want to explore further the views of parents. It is problematic to ascribe one set of beliefs to a subgroup, yet many school reform efforts seem to do just that. All of these elements of inquiry lead me to the research questions listed below.

## Research Questions

1. How knowledgeable about the American school system and American schooling are immigrant Spanish-speaking parents? What do they not understand and what do they want to understand better?
2. What do Spanish-speaking parents of children enrolled in a program serving English learners in a U.S. elementary school want for their children from the school? What do they regard are the most important ways they can support their child's education?
3. What are parents' perceptions about the experiences their children have at school and what do they want the school to know about their children so they have good experiences at school?

## Definition of Terms

There are many terms, acronyms, and abbreviations used in the field of education. Below are terms that appear in this paper and/or appear in the accounts from parents.

**ACCESS** tests are assessments that meet the federal and state laws requiring that English learners (ELs) be assessed annually to measure their proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking English, as well as the progress they are making in learning English.

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)** is the key measure in determining whether a public school or school district is making "annual progress" towards the academic goals established by each state.

**Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO)** are English proficiency assessments that each state must give to English learners annually to track the attainment of English. In Massachusetts, this is the ACCESS tests.

**English Language Development (ELD)** typically refers to a program or curriculum to teach English learners English.

**English Learner (EL)** when used with respect to an individual, means an individual—

(A) who is aged 3 through 21;

(B) who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school;

(C) (i) who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English;

(ii) (I) who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and

(II) who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency; or

(iii) who is migratory, whose native language is a language other than English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and

(D) whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual—

(i) the ability to meet the challenging State academic standards;

(ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or

(iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society.

Taken from (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

**English Proficient** is the way in which students in an ELD program get relabeled once they show proficiency on a state annual measurable achievement objectives (AMAO) English proficiency assessment.

**High-Needs Students** in Massachusetts refers to all students in a school or district belonging to at least one of the following individual subgroups: students with disabilities, English learners and former English learners, or low-income students (eligible for free/reduced price school lunch).

**Limited English Proficient (LEP)** is the moniker given to an English learner who has yet to show proficiency either by an entrance assessment or through a yearly AMAO.

**Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)** is designed to meet the requirements of the Education Reform Law of 1993. This law specifies that the testing program must:

- test all public school students in Massachusetts, including students with disabilities and English learners;
- measure performance based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework learning standards; and
- report on the performance of individual students, schools, and districts.

The MCAS program is used to hold schools and districts accountable for the progress they have made annually toward the objective of the No Child Left Behind Law that all students be proficient in Reading and Mathematics by 2014 (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, 2014).

**Opt-outs** are students who qualify for bilingual education services but whose parents choose to deny said services. These students still need to be tracked and their progress reported by bilingual department leaders for state and national data collection on English learners.

**Parent Involvement** is defined for the first time by the United States Department of Education in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) reauthorizing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) as "the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring:

- that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning;
- that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school;
- that parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and
- that other activities are carried out, such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA (Parental Involvement). (Department of Education, 2004)

**Parent Engagement** tends to be defined through a juxtaposition with parent involvement. Ferlazzo and Hammond (2009) explain that engagement occurs by having schools strategically *engage* parents opposed to simply *involving* parents. Engagement is more of a philosophy to view parents' roles differently and to view them as true partners in their children's education. Schools that engage parents "assist them in developing and harnessing their own energy" (p. 2) as they gain voice and social capital in the decisions made at the school.

**PARCC** stands for **t**he Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers which refers to a group of states working together to develop a set of assessments that measure whether students are on track to be successful in college and careers. In some school systems in Massachusetts for several years, schools took these assessments instead of the MCAS assessments. All schools in Massachusetts returned to MCAS testing in the school year 2016 – 2017.

**Sheltered English Immersion (SEI)** is a program where ELs are taught content in English and the educator is supposed to "shelter" the content in ways that show knowledge of best practices for instructing ELs as well as a cultural sensitivity to ELs. In some parts of the United States, SEI may denote to *Sheltered English Instruction* which refers to the same conceptual framework. **Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE)** is a program for English learners where the content instruction is given to the students in their native language while students concurrently receive ELD instruction to learn English. Once the student shows proficiency in academic English through an annual measurable achievement objectives English proficiency assessment, the student is moved into an English instructional setting, usually sheltered English immersion (SEI). **Two-Way Bilingual** is a bilingual program in which students develop language proficiency in two languages by receiving instruction in English and another language. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017, p. 34)

## Significance of the Study

This study will examine the perceptions, ideas, and expectations of parents of English learners, a subgroup of children who have not fared well statistically on achievement tests across the United States. As these students work to learn content and keep pace with their peers, they are also saddled with the tasks of acculturating into a new culture and learning English. Additionally, their parents face the daunting task of navigating the American school system. As local, state, and federal policies have changed and affected school leaders' design of educational programs to educate these students, a dimension seems to have been ignored: the voices of parents of English learners.

Indeed, more attention is needed that solicits the opinions and attitudes of parents of English learners. As the population of these students grows and a greater number of school

leaders face the challenges posed in educating English learners, there will be an even greater need to have a clear understanding of how to interact with and involve parents, specifically how to engage them in a manner that offers them a voice in educational decision-making. Because navigating the American school system can be a daunting endeavor, assisting parents with this navigation should start with efforts that seek to understand their perspectives and to elicit feedback from them.

This research will further inform the practices of classroom teachers and educators who are tasked with working with students who are English learners. Hearing and knowing what the parents of these students want from the school for their children will only help to illuminate school leaders' work; after all, they are responsible for setting and implementing policies, choosing and executing programs, and aligning expectations that all affect the educational experiences of students who are English language learners. The students' parents' perspectives will inform school leaders and thereby guide them to the value present in removing obstacles that interfere with the school's ability to reach out to the parents of their ELs.

Finally, as a result of the relatively minimal research available with regards to the perceptions of parents of ELs, this study should help future researchers in studying the complex issues that face these students, who, along with their families, strive to succeed in the United States school system and in our society.

## Limitations and Delimitations and Potential Biases of the Study

This section will identify delimitations, limitations, and potential biases of the research study.

**Delimitations**

There are several different variables that delimit the scope of this study specifically about who are the participants and what the shared demographics are of the participants. This study does not analyze the attitudes and perceptions of teachers, nor does it consider the attitudes of students. The sample population includes parents of elementary students only. Other controlled variables are that the participants are Spanish-speaking parents of students who are English learners. Only the viewpoints of parents and caregivers of elementary school students are considered. While there was consideration to broaden the scope of the study, the decision was made not to, for there may be different considerations and areas of focus at each level (elementary, middle, and high) that may detract from a more meaningful analysis that occur by focusing solely on elementary student caregivers.

**Limitations**

There are limitations to this research. The parents participating in this study are not representative of all Latinos nor are they representative of all parents of English learners. The study involves small sample sizes and generalization to the larger population is limited as well. Parents participating in this study each have unknown previous experiences and histories which likely influenced their responses. There was no attempt to measure these previous experiences and histories.

The reliability of the data collection instruments has not been established, and in no way, should these be considered standard measurement instruments.

**Potential Biases**

It is essential that I disclose that I am a principal of a bilingual elementary school in Massachusetts. I am mindful that I have beliefs, assumptions, and opinions drawn from my

experiences working with English learners and their parents. Moreover, I conducted this research with parents from the school where I work, so I had additional challenges to communicate clearly with participants the need for both them and me to do our best to separate my role as principal from the research I was conducting.

## Design of Study

This section discusses the design of the study and the role of the researcher. Additionally, selection of participants, choice of the setting, data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis are explained in different subsections.

### General Aspects of Design

I employed a phenomenological method approach specifically because I am interested in describing "meaning for several individuals of their *lived experience* ... as they experience a phenomenon (being parents of elementary school aged English learners)" (Creswell, 2007, pp. 57-58). The "phenomenon" being that all participants are Spanish-speaking parents of elementary school aged children attending an American elementary school. The purpose was to understand a common experience of parents and to provide a common account of their perspective(s). I chose this method because I sought to hear the attitudes, opinions, and expectations of a group of parents whose children are sharing a similar experience in school and who historically and presently struggle to perform well as measured by state proficiency exams. The participants were parents of elementary-aged children for whom Spanish is the primary language used in the home. All the parents in the study had at least one child in a bilingual program (either sheltered English immersion or transitional bilingual education).

**Setting**

I chose to do this research with the parents of children who attend the school where I am the principal. This condition obligated me to have a heightened awareness of an impact of bias so I took deliberate steps and measures to control for this (see Role of Researcher below). The ability to have access to the population of parents (participants) I was soliciting is extremely difficult. I anticipated I would be better able to access parents who meet the demographic characteristics that I targeted and to collect data on their attitudes by reaching out to parents who were already familiar with the researcher.

**Selection of Participants**

School data were reviewed to identify parents who report that Spanish is spoken as the primary language in the home and whose children are in a bilingual program. Though the school had grade kindergarten through grade five, only parents of students in grades kindergarten through fourth grade were considered for the study. This was due to the unknown with regards to the length of the study, where parents of older students may not get to be debriefed by the researcher if their child(ren) move on to middle school. The establishment of these parameters enabled the consideration of approximately 210 parents out of the approximately 520 families who attend the school.

Once parents were identified, the researcher invited parents to a Bilingual Parent Meeting held at the school library in the spring on the night of but prior to the school's Open House night. Flyers advertising the evening were sent home in children's backpacks in both English and Spanish (See Appendices A and B). The meeting covered three main topics: the school's summer reading program at the town library, summer school options for children, and the option to take a survey for this research.

## Role of Researcher

The role of the researcher was to earn the trust of the subjects and to be mindful that it was important that all was done to distinguish between the roles of principal and researcher. It is imperative that all was done to control for bias and to determine the work and intentions were clear. To do this, as the researcher, I had to be transparent throughout the process with my district, my staff, and the parents I invited to be participants. For the school district, a detailed proposal was submitted and approval was received from the district's institutional review board (IRB). I met with my staff at a scheduled staff meeting and reviewed my study, my intentions, and my reasoning behind engaging our parents (see Appendix C – Talking Points). Finally, throughout the process I explained the purpose of my work and at each step reviewed the separation of my roles as researcher and principal when I was engaging parents.

## Data Collection

Invitations were sent out to the 210 parents where they were invited to attend a Bilingual Parent Meeting (see Appendices A and B) prior to Open House night at our school. Based on past parental participation experiences, it was anticipated that fewer than half the parents would attend this meeting. Because many of the students in the school were siblings, the actual number of families invited was fewer than the 210 who received flyers. Thirty-eight participants completed the questionnaire. From these participants, ten were selected to be interviewed at a later date. After responses were collected, they were translated into English.

**Instrumentation.** Two instrumental devices were used: a questionnaire handed out at the first meeting in English and Spanish (see Appendices D and E) and interview questions with an interview protocol (see Appendix G). District-approved interpreters were available to help with translating messages during both experiences.

***Questionnaire.*** In preparing the research questions, strategies for ethnographic interviews outlined by James Spradley (1979) were used for guidance. The questionnaire was given as an online survey form through Qualtrics Metrics and was approximately seven pages in length. It was translated into Spanish and parents had the option to take it in either English or Spanish on a computer or with paper and pencil. The questionnaire included questions that addressed the research questions and would later inform the creation of the interview questions. The questionnaire was handed out at a Bilingual Parent meeting. Three district-approved interpreters were available to assist preliterate caregivers who needed assistance reading questions and/or help transcribe responses. Two native Spanish-speaking educators reviewed the tool and checked it for cultural competence.

***Interview protocol.*** Ten parents were selected for follow up interviews. Interviews were originally scheduled to take place in the town library, but the library became unavailable; a middle school, one of the three middle schools in town, was used instead. A district-approved interpreter accompanied the researcher to the interviews. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. These interviews provided real stories and real experiences of the parents in the study.

***Piloting instruments.*** A pilot questionnaire was administered with five parents of English learners from a different elementary school. A meeting was held where the procedures the researcher intended to follow were used (see Appendix J). Data was taken from this experience and used to hone the questionnaire to better insure the research questions were being addressed. Additionally, a similar pilot was administered with the interview questions with parents from a different school with similar demographics prior to finalizing the interview questions.

**Data Analysis**

The questionnaire responses, after being translated into English, yielded responses that helped to inform each of the research questions. The questionnaire data were reviewed and responses were coded. Throughout the coding process, common themes and/or patterns were sought. Qualitative data software was used to assist in this process. Additionally, techniques described in Maxwell (2005) were employed for coding qualitative research. This information helped to inform and guide the development of the follow-up interview questions and assisted in the creation of the interview protocol. As needed, the researcher consulted with his dissertation committee to confirm the coding processes. After the interviews, similar coding methods were followed to draw conclusions for the dissertation using strategies associated with phenomenological and qualitative research suggested by Robert Weiss (1994). Methods for categorizing, coding, and displaying data were used to guide analysis and to inform understanding.

## Chapter Outline

The dissertation is composed of five chapters. They are organized in the following manner:

Chapter 1 is the introduction. It provides the reader with an overview of the problem and describes the researcher's connection and interest to the problem. This chapter also examines potential biases and considers the influence of sociocultural factors that may have impacted the work. Both the purpose of the study and the significance of the study is detailed, including a definition of key terms and an explanation of the limitations and delimitations of the study. Chapter 2 is the literature review. It provides the reader with an introduction to the different bodies of literature that were reviewed in order to guide the reader and provide context. It is

divided into the following subsections: (a) shifting educational landscapes and the impact on families of English learners; (b) parent involvement and representation in schools; (c) perspectives of parents of English learners; and (d) schools' preparedness for working with families of English learners.

Chapter 3 is the methodology and describes the design of the study. It consists of a section to describe the general aspect of the design and a section that explains data collection methods.

Chapter 4 is data analysis and includes a description of the results of the study as well as an analysis of the data. It describes how the data are organized so that each question is answered. Research questions are used as the organizing framework.

Chapter 5 is comprised of summaries, conclusions, implications, and recommendations. It reiterates the purpose of the study, the research questions, its design, and the sampling as well as a summary of the data and results.

# CHAPTER 2 – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

## Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to show existing scholarship that is foundational for this study. This research investigated the perceptions of parents of English learners about their elementary-aged children's schooling, the expectations they have for their children's education, and their understanding of their role with regards to the education of their children. In particular, this chapter describes the growing population of English learners in the United States and reviews literature that considers the relationship between the parents of these children and the schools their children attend and, more specifically, the attitudes and perceptions of Spanish-speaking parents of ELs. Accordingly, research specific to the attitudes of the parents of English learners and their involvement in their children's schooling is reviewed.

The chapter begins with a review of the changing bilingual educational landscape for non-English speaking students and their families in the United States, including the historical changes in bilingual education that are a result of changes to federal and state laws as well as judiciary decisions. These shifts and changes have affected English learner's educational experiences over time. The next section introduces varied conceptions of parent involvement in schools and its effect on student achievement; several theories of parent involvement are highlighted, including Epstein's (1995) theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, Han and Love's (2015) Stages of Immigrant Parent Involvement and Auerbach's (2007) continuum from Moral Supporters to Struggling Advocates. The following section considers the perspectives of parents of English learners while the final section highlights schools' preparedness for working with families of English learners. A summary is presented at the end of the chapter.

## Shifting Educational Landscapes and the Impact on the Families of English Learners

The debate in the United States as to how best to welcome and engage students and families of non-English speaking backgrounds into school communities is long-lasting. English learners (ELs) are the fastest-growing student population in the United States, growing 60% in the last decade, as compared with 7% growth of the general student population (Chao, Schenkel, & Olsen, 2013, p. 4). Districts, school leaders, and educators struggle to adapt to the demands of this steep population growth (Lewis-Moreno, 2007). This section is divided into three parts: (a) an analysis of present shifts in the bilingual population of students in the United States; (b) a review of early bilingual education in the U.S.; and (c) a consideration of the influence of federal laws, state laws, and judiciary decisions as they have impacted the education of ELs and thus, the experience their families have had in schools.

### Present Shifts in Bilingual Populations in United States' Schools

According to the United States Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2017) there were 4.6 million ELs in United States' schools in 2012-2013, which totals 9.4% of all students. Li and Edwards (2010) state, "In 1990, 1 of every 20 public school children in grades K-12 was an English language learner, that is, a student who speaks English either not at all or with enough limitations that he or she cannot fully participate in mainstream English instruction" (p. 16). "By 2020, estimates indicate that half of all public school students will have non-English speaking backgrounds" (Chao et al., 2013, p. 4). Because of these growing numbers, a greater focus has emerged as to the ways in which schools welcome, acculturate, engage, and educate English learners and families into the school community and how school leaders manage strategies to support the learning of ELs in addressing the issues and obstacles they face daily.

Other than English, the most prevalent language spoken in the homes of children who are English learners is Spanish. Eighty percent of ELs in the United States come from Spanish-speaking backgrounds while the remaining 20% come from over four hundred various language backgrounds (Li & Edwards, 2010). In 2011, "for the first time, one in four (24.7%) public elementary school students were Hispanic … among all pre-K through 12th grade public school students, a record 23.9% were Hispanic" (Fry & Lopez, 2012, p. 4). Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008) note that "in the last decade, ELL students have become increasingly isolated, segregated by language, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. In 2000, six out of seven elementary students (ELs) and two out of three secondary ELL students lived in households where no English was spoken. Over the last five years, linguistic isolation has increased in school as well, where ELLs are highly concentrated in a few schools" (p. 6). According to the authors, this segregation makes it extremely difficult for linguistic minority students to integrate with English-speaking students. Although issues surrounding the education of English learners are often situated within the sociopolitical context of the contentious debate surrounding immigration, 84% of Latino ELs are US-born (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). As this growth continues, school leaders work to learn new methods to engage the parents of these children.

Immigrant families and students who are English learners have a challenging task to both acculturate into United States' as well as learn and understand how to navigate the public schools. Students are tasked with learning not only English but also the content and standards taught to their peers. Historically, schools and school systems have taken different approaches to interacting with and responding to the needs of families with diverse language backgrounds; as a result, the methods to educate English learners and to engage their parents have varied over time. It is important to understand these shifts in practices and how they have affected both the

educational experiences of children and their families' interactions with the school. In addition, these changes impact the manner in which families and children acculturate into United States school systems and bear profoundly on efforts to comprehend how parents and families understand and interact with schools and school systems.

**Early Bilingual Education Policies and Decisions**

There has been an evolution of legal occurrences and policy movements that have had a major effect on the way schools understand their obligation to educate English learners and work with their families. Questions regarding the education of English learners are not novel, for the United States has had high numbers of ELs since its inception.[4] Federal laws, court rulings, and state laws have impacted how ELs are educated and how families are engaged. According to Lepore (2002), as early as 1790, when the first census was reported, twenty-five percent of Americans likely spoke languages other than English (p. 28). As a result of this linguistic variety, the founding fathers chose *not* to designate English as the official language of the United States when our governments, federal and state, were being formed.

The first laws passed regarding the education experiences for non-English speaking students were at the local and state level and can be traced to the early 1900s and World War I. At this time, in many communities, there was a prevalence of monolinguistic language other than English being spoken as immigrants from similar foreign countries tended to cluster together and maintain much of their native language and culture in their new communities. It was common practice for children to be taught in their native language in the local public school. Teaching children in their native language is an illustration of local school districts meeting the specific

[4] Native Americans were a significant population in what was considered the United States when the British immigrants arrived in Plymouth, Massachusetts. They spoke a variety of languages.

needs of the children and families living in their communities. As an example, "German bilingual education was prevalent until World War I when legislation was passed in 34 states, between 1917 and 1922, mandating English as the official language of instruction" (Wiley & Wright, 2004, p. 147).

**The Impact of Federal Laws, State Laws, and Court Rulings**

The establishment and changes to federal laws and state laws as well as landmark court rulings regarding bilingual education have each impacted how English learners are educated and how families are engaged. What follows is a timeline of these major shifts and an explanation of how each influenced the way schools educated ELs and how these families and children interacted with the school.

The Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s resulted in the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. Title VI of this Act established anti-discrimination policies that applied to all institutions receiving federal funds, including schools. Title VI requires that " … no person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefit of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (Civil Rights Act of 1964, 1964). If students in a school spoke a language other than English and that school received federal funding, the school was responsible to teach those students in a manner that allowed them to access the curriculum. The education of ELs, therefore, became a civil rights issue and, essentially, schools and districts assumed responsibility for meeting learning and language needs of the children and families they served. Many districts interpreted this as a necessity to instruct students in their native language to enable students to access the curriculum in an equal fashion to their English-speaking peers.

The Bilingual Education Act (Title VII of the Civil Rights Act) was passed in 1968 and for the first time, provided federal funding specifically for bilingual programs. By 1974, in a mere six years, 220 bilingual programs servicing 340,000 students (292,200 of which were Spanish-speaking) received Title VII funds (Kloss, 1998). "Federal Law required schools to help ELs develop English proficiency, and meet state academic standards" (Wright from Hamayan & Freeman, 2006, p. 87). The way in which this was to be achieved was left to the individual states, creating disagreement as to the Act's original goals. Additionally, each time Title VII was reauthorized, there were changes that affected the way resources were disseminated and the manner in which programs received funding; such changes revealed an emphasis on political considerations rather than on the needs, perspectives, or wishes of bilingual families.

In 1974, a class action suit was brought against the San Francisco Unified School district on behalf of student Kinney Lau (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). The claim was that Lau and other English learners' civil rights were violated under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. The suit cited discrimination based on national origin. In essence, the claim stated that English learners, because of their limited English proficiency, were being denied access to the curriculum that was being delivered to students in English. In a unanimous decision, the United States Supreme Court supported the claims of the plaintiffs, and English learners became a class whose civil rights deserved protection. "There is no equality of treatment," wrote Justice William O. Douglas, "merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education" (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). The case established that equal treatment no longer necessarily meant equality, and schools, as a result, bore a new responsibility to meet the specific needs of ELs to allow them to access the curriculum "equally." As a result, the Office of

Civil Rights established the "Lau remedies" to ensure no students' civil rights would be violated because of their spoken language. These remedies required districts to implement bilingual education programs for English learners to meet these students' particular language needs.

In 1981, another landmark case**,** *Castañeda v. Pickard,* the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, for the first time, laid out a directive to schools and created an "analytical framework or three-part test by which 'appropriate actions' by school districts 'to overcome language barriers' could be assessed. The criteria were that any prescribed remedy (a) be based on sound educational theory; (b) have a reasonable plan for implementation, including the hiring of appropriate personnel; and (c) produce positive educational results" (Wiley, 2007, p. 100). The Castañeda case is an example where a school district failed to consider a parent's perspectives regarding his child's education; as a result, the parent elected to use the legal system to force change.

In 2001, the Bilingual Education Act (Title VII) was replaced with the Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students Act (Title III) of No Child Left Behind. This Act established "annual measurable achievement objectives" (AMAOs) whose goal was to increase students' level of English proficiency. According to the Act, if there are no gains based on the AMAOs in four years, corrective measures, by the federal and/or state government, may be taken against a district. This expectation put tremendous pressure on districts to teach students English. Unlike previously passed laws and the interpretations of the reauthorizations of Title VII with regard to ELs, the goal of NCLB—to teach English learners English as quickly as possible—is explicit.

Similarly, three states, through voter initiatives, around the same time period NCLB was passed at the federal level, passed laws restricting bilingual education (California [1998],

Arizona [2000], and Massachusetts [2002]). These laws pushed for full English immersion programs such as sheltered English immersion.[5] Each state's law passed with similar margins (well over 60% of the popular vote), and each required major changes to the way English learners received their education. According to Wiley and Wright (2004), these state referenda were proposed using the following line of reasoning: "(a) English is the language of opportunity because of its dominance in science, business and technology; (b) immigrant language-minority parents are eager to have their children learn it; (c) schools have a moral obligation to teach English given its importance; (d) for the past two decades schools have performed poorly in educating immigrant children, as indicated by their higher rates of dropping out of school; and (e) young immigrant children acquire second languages easily" (p. 150).

[5] In Massachusetts, Sheltered English Immersion is defined as having two components: (a) Sheltered content instruction; and (b) English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. Sheltered content instruction is instruction that includes approaches, strategies and methodology that make the content of the lesson more comprehensible to students who are not yet proficient in English. Although it is designed for ELLs who have an intermediate level of proficiency in English, ELLs with less than an intermediate level of proficiency can benefit from sheltered content instruction. Sheltered content classes are characterized by active engagement by ELLs as well as lesson plans that include language objectives, which address the linguistic requirements of the content to be taught (e.g. content vocabulary), and content objectives based on standards from the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction is explicit; direct instruction about the English language seeks intentionally to promote English language acquisition by ELL students and to help them "catch up" to their student peers who are proficient in English. It includes learning outcomes in speaking, listening comprehension, reading, and writing. ESL instruction is a required part of an academic program for ELL students. ESL instruction should be based on an ESL curriculum and appropriate ESL textbooks and other materials. In effective ESL classrooms, learning takes place when there is sustained verbal interaction, often in small groups, as the students complete carefully designed academic tasks that include speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Effective ESL instruction is often characterized by the use of thematic units, project-based instruction, and language instruction closely aligned with grade-appropriate content standards. Students should receive between 1 and 2.5 hours of ESL instruction per day, depending on proficiency level. (Crawford, 1999, p. 104)

These referenda are significant as they were each passed by popular vote. By definition, a voter-initiative ballot question needs a majority vote to pass; thus, one can assume that minority parent perspectives may be less likely to be represented in an effort for a majority vote among the general populace. As a result of these legislative actions, English learners were no longer allowed to receive transitional bilingual education[6] (TBE) instruction (without waivers) to best meet their language needs and/or to allow them to have equal access to the curriculum, thereby enabling them to learn academic content in their native language.

Restrictive language learning experiences in the education of English learners has fluctuated over the history of public education in the United States. Wiley (2007) found that scholars who reviewed historical restrictive language policies, such as Liebowitz (1971), compared their "relationship to broader societal policies, dominant beliefs, and power relationships between groups" (p. 91). Wiley adds that Liebowitz determined that language policies have been used throughout history "as instruments of social control … (and adds that he) concluded that the motivations to impose official English language and to restrict native languages in schools corresponded to the general level of hostility of the dominant group toward the various language minority groups" (p. 91).

These federal laws, court rulings, and state laws can—and often do—impact local policies as well as the implementation and execution of instructional methods. Additionally,

[6] Transitional bilingual education programming is defined as a subtractive language learning education program type. Students in this program receive instruction in their native language for academic content while they are learning English. (Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy, 2007)

these nationwide debates can frame the discourse that people experience at the local level and, thereby, influence the tone of such interactions. Each of these shifts in policy carries implicit messages to families of English learners, hinting that they are not a part of the community, that their language, culture, and needs are not valued, and that their existence in the community is burdensome. Potentially, the outcomes of these shifts are opinions regarding English learners that may not be based in research but rather in discourse surrounding political shifts in attitudes towards these students, their parents, and their families. This skewed emphasis is significant, for ultimately these debates and the environment they create influence the experiences of English learners and parents in schools.

## Parent Involvement and Representation in Schools

As school leaders navigate strategies to meet the needs of an ever-growing population of English learners, there is evidence that there is a struggle to engage with parents of these students from this marginalized group (Panferov, 2010). There are decades of research supporting the idea that parent involvement with schools has a positive influence on children's educational achievement (Jeynes, 2012; Jeynes, 2003; Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, & Lloyd, 2013). McKenna and Millen (2013) note the growth of research on parent participation over the past 30 years, citing that the "emergence of national and regional parent involvement coalitions (as evidence which have) brought parent engagement to the forefront of educational discourse" (p. 10). This section reviews literature concerning parent involvement and representation in schools. It begins with a sub-section reviewing the different contemporary definitions of parent involvement and follows with a sub-section analyzing the increased focus on parent involvement and the value of such involvement. The last sub-section is an analysis of literature examining parent involvement specific to bilingual families.

**Parent Involvement Defined**

Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, and Luppescu (2010) define parent involvement as being "composed of two measures: teachers' outreach to parents and parent involvement in the school. The first of these focuses on the proactive efforts of teachers to invite parents into their classroom, understand parental concerns, and embrace parents as partners in their children's education. The second measure focuses on the extent to which parents reciprocate by being involved in school activities and responding to specific concerns that teachers may raise about their child's schoolwork" (p. 72). McKenna and Millen (2013) refer to parent involvement as "engagement" and note it has two elements:

> Parent (or caregiver) engagement … encapsulates both parent voice and parent presence. Parent voice implies not only that parents have ideas and opinions about their children, but also that educators are receptive to this voice, allowing for an open, multidirectional flow of communication. Similarly, parent presence refers to actions related to the voices of caregivers. (p. 9)

Within the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), parent involvement is specifically addressed and defined. The statute defines parental involvement as the:

> Participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring: that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning; that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school; that parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the

> education of their child; and that other activities are carried out, such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA[7]. (Department of Education, 2004)

Barrueco, Smith, and Stephens (2015) define parent engagement as:

> two types of activity: (a) parents' nurturing, responsive interactions with their children, at home and in the community, that help children acquire competencies they need for school success; and (b) interactions parents have with providers in early care and education settings that help both parents and providers promote children's learning and development. (p. 3)

The concept of parent involvement in a child's schooling may be defined differently based on cultural background. Zarate (2007) interviewed approximately 90 Latino parents in three urban centers in the United States and found that Latino parents' perceptions of parental involvement could be grouped into two distinct categories: academic involvement and life participation. Academic involvement consisted of attending parent-teacher conferences, signing homework as required by the teacher, knowing when to expect report cards, going to the library with their child, visiting the classroom during open house nights, and listening to their child read. Academic involvement "was understood to encompass activities associated with homework, educational enrichment, and academic performance" (p. 8). Life participation comprised of being aware of their child's peer group and interacting with peers' parents, communicating with

[7] Section 1118 of the ESEA (Every Student Succeeds Act) is a document created by the United States Department of Education. It's stated purpose, "is to assist SEAs (State Education Agency), LEAs (Local Education Agency), and schools in administering the parental involvement provisions of Title I, Part A of the ESEA … (it is) primarily based on issues raised by State and local school officials and staff, education leaders, technical assistance providers, parents, parent advocacy organizations, parental involvement coordinators/liaisons, and others who are actively engaged in working with parents to improve student achievement and learning." (Department of Education, 2004, p. 2)

their child, encouraging siblings to look out for each other, and warning of dangers outside of the home, such as illegal drugs. Life participation "characterized ways that parents provided life education and were holistically integrated into their children's lives in school, as well as away from it. When asked to define parental involvement, Latino parents mentioned life participation more frequently than academic involvement" (p. 8). Similarly, through their research, McKenna and Millen (2013) note the importance of context and culture when defining parent engagement, maintaining that parent engagement is a combination of "parent voice" and "parent presence." "Parent voice implies not only that parents have ideas and opinions about their children, but also that educators are receptive to this voice, allowing for an open, multidirectional flow of communication." (p. 9) Relatedly, they view parent presence in a manner that is analogous to the examples of life participation given above. "Parent presence does not simply reference involvement or overt participation in schools, but also includes a broad variety of subtle ways in which parents are active in a child's life" (p. 36). They argue that parent involvement in the lives of children is comprehensive and that it "is fluid, robust, and specific to context and culture" (p. 9).

Authors cited in this chapter use the terms parent involvement, parent participation, and parent engagement differently, and though there may be important distinctions between the terms, for this work the terms are used interchangeably.

**Increased Focus and Value of Parent Involvement**

Since the late 1960s, parent involvement has been addressed by federal and state governments in different ways. As part of President Johnson's War on Poverty, he pushed for the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which created Title I programs and funding to support schools with high percentages of low-income students. The

original Act, however, failed to address parent involvement. Instead, parent involvement was first addressed at the federal level in Title I regulations in 1968 (Mapp, 2012). Between 1968 and the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB), federal parent-involvement regulations only impacted Title I schools—schools which had a high percentage of low-income students and received federal, Title I funding. In 1993, Massachusetts passed legislation that provided guidance to school principals to create school councils that meet regularly and to have parent representation on these school councils (Massachusetts Education Reform Act, 1993). In 2002, NCLB, for the first time, mandated parent involvement for all public schools and defined what constitutes acceptable involvement. In addition, this legislation put the onus on schools to engage parents in ways that represent a departure from many conventional practices.

According to Joyce Epstein (2005), NCLB's requirements represent "four principles of the sociology of education that replace old ways of thinking about parental involvement with new ways of organizing more-equitable and effective programs of school, family, and community partnerships … (these include the concepts that) parental involvement requires multilevel leadership, parental involvement is a component of school and classroom organization, parental involvement recognizes the shared responsibilities of educators and families for children's learning and success in school and parental involvement programs must include all families, even those who are not currently involved, not just the easiest to reach" (p. 179) (see Appendix K).

Some literature considers the manner in which parent involvement improves student experiences and achievement. Drawing on data from the Chicago public elementary schools in the 1990s, Bryk et al. (2010) present a framework of essential supports and community resources to facilitate school improvement. Sebring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, and Luppescu (2006) list

five essential supports —leadership, parent-community ties, professional capacity, student-centered learning climate, and ambitious instruction—needed for schools to improve (pp. 1 - 2). With regard to parent-community ties, Bryk et al. (2010) explain that research cites three "distinct dimensions meriting attention: (1) school efforts to reach out to parents, to engage them directly in the processes of strengthening student learning; (2) teacher efforts to become knowledgeable about student culture and the local community and to draw on this awareness in their lessons; and (3) strengthening the network among community organizations, to expand services for students and their families" (p. 57). NCLB placed the onus on the schools to gather data and get acquainted with the needs of the families and children they serve and, moreover, to find ways to engage with parents.

There is evidence that suggests parent involvement can correlate with improved student outcomes. As an example, Hayes, Blake, Darensbourg, and Castillo (2015) studied how Latino parent and peer beliefs and behaviors influenced middle school students' achievement and school behavioral engagement. They found that "consistent with previous studies, parent and peer influences were significant predictors of both measures of achievement values … however, (they) did not find a significant relation between parent and peer influences and school behavioral engagement" (p. 152). The authors explain that perhaps "one possible explanation as to why parent and peer influences did not predict students' school behavioral engagement was because this construct was the only variable that was not self-reported by adolescents but rather by teachers" (p. 152). Parent influences had an effect on student achievement but not on students' behavioral engagement in the school.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law by president George W. Bush in 2001. The Act "require(d) schools to help every student achieve a high level of

proficiency in math, reading, and science by 2014. It also required districts and schools to involve families in ways that aimed to boost student achievement, yet most districts and schools struggle(d) with how to implement effective partnership programs and how to measure the 'value added' effects of family and community involvement for student achievement in specific subjects" (Epstein, Sanders, & Sheldon, 2007, p. i). As schools struggled with the requirements of NCLB and restrictive language education movements, the stark disconnect between many parents and schools persisted.

Using data from the Chicago Longitudinal Study, Barnard (2004) analyzed parent and teacher ratings of parent involvement in early childhood education to identify its correlation with success in high school. "Results indicated that even after controlling for background characteristics and risk factors, parent involvement in school was significantly associated with lower rates of high school dropout, increased on-time high school completion, and highest grade completed" (p. 39). According to Barnard (2004), her study "suggests that parent involvement in school is an important component in early childhood education to help promote long-term effects" (p. 39). Barnard (2004) further noted the importance of her findings:

> It is certainly a cost-effective way to enhance existing school programs. Encouraging parents to become involved in their child's education early on can lead to lasting benefits for the child. This investigation is the first of its kind to find a significant association between parent involvement from elementary school and success into high school. One reason may be the use of longitudinal data. While it may seem a tedious task to some researchers, follow-up evaluations that include teachers should ask additional questions about parent involvement. (p. 59)

Parent involvement comes in multiple dimensions. Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, and Lloyd (2013) reviewed family involvement research over a 10-year period. They found that "with guidance, many parents across all socio-economic, educational, and racial or ethnic backgrounds are interested in and able to conduct learning activities at home with their young children. Parents and their children engaged in a host of activities (including shared book reading, dialogic reading, home tutoring, and family conversations), and these activities were related to positive results for children's vocabulary, listening comprehension, rates of word reading, story comprehension, and other reading skills" (p. 3). Similarly, Jeynes (2012) performed a meta-analysis of 51 studies and looked at the efficacy of parent involvement programs. He found that "parental involvement initiatives that involve parents and their children reading together (i.e., engaging in "shared reading"), parents checking their children's homework, parents and teachers communicating with one another, and partnering with one another have a noteworthy relationship with academic outcomes" (p. 730).

Joyce Epstein (1995) argues there are numerous short-term and long-term benefits to schools creating partnerships with both families and communities:

> There are many reasons for developing school, family, and community partnerships. They can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work. However, the main reason to create such partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life. When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work. (pp. 81-82)

Epstein (1995) created the parent involvement theory of overlapping spheres of influence. Figure 1 is graphic representation of how the work of families, schools, and the community can and should overlap with children being at the center. According to Epstein, there are two models of overlapping spheres: an external model and an internal model.

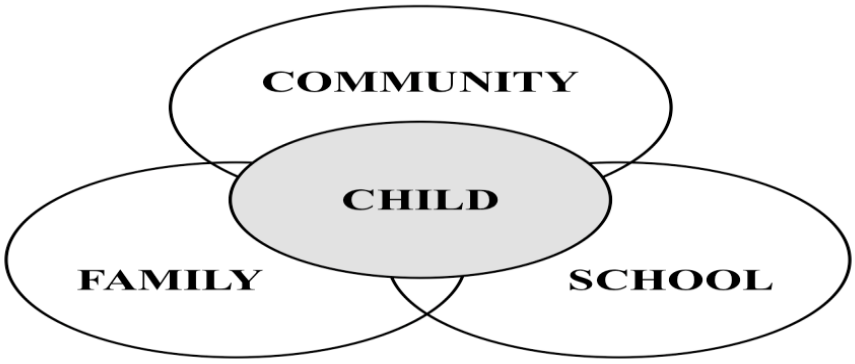


*Figure 1*. Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence.

The external model of overlapping spheres of influence contemplates that the three spheres potentially can be pulled together to create more overlap or be pushed apart. Essentially, Epstein theorizes that some schools' policies and practices work to engage the different spheres (pull them together) while others work not to do so (push them apart). It is not binary but instead a continuum. "In this model, there are some practices that schools, families, and communities conduct separately and some that they conduct jointly in order to influence children's learning and development" (p. 82). The internal model focuses on the interpersonal relationships that exist or could develop across the spheres. "These social relationships may be enacted and studied at an institutional level (e.g., when a school invites all families to an event or sends the same communications to all families) and at an individual level (e.g., when a parent and a teacher meet in conference or talk by phone)" (p. 82) .

Epstein (1995, 2005; 2007), a leader in the field of parent involvement, urges schools to create different programs to involve communities and parents and maintains that these could

look different depending on the needs across the spheres. Her research, however, has found common types of involvement across schools and grades. She has created a framework to which she refers as the "six types of involvement," or the six types of "caring." Epstein argues that focusing on these areas: (a) parenting and helping all families establish a home environment to support children as students; (b) communicating by designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication about a child's progress; (c) volunteering and the recruitment and organization of parent help and support in the school; (d) learning at home and how schools provide ideas to parents to help students with schoolwork; (e) decision-making and how the school includes parents and develops parent leaders, and finally (f) collaborating with the community (pp. 19 - 20), will help educators create programs and partnerships that will ultimately improve practice and, consequently, outcomes for students and families.

Parent involvement can possess multiple dimensions that can be complicated to study due to the difficulty in isolating each dimension and determining what, if any, obstacles potentially impede any particular dimension at any given time. Epstein et al. (2007) considered variables that are often cited by scholars and school leaders as impediments to school leaders engaging parents in the school and found that:

> Neither district size nor poverty level (percent free and reduced-price lunch) significantly affected district leaders' reports of leadership and facilitation activities or schools' progress on partnerships. The results confirmed that district leaders could go beyond old patterns of monitoring schools for compliance on federal regulations. Instead, leaders could provide direct assistance to help schools organize teams, write plans, and build skills for conducting effective family and community partnership programs, as directed by NCLB. (pp. 1 - 2)

**Parent Involvement Specific to Immigrant Parents**

Thus far, this section has established that during the past 40 years there has been considerable research and theorizing about parent involvement. Nevertheless, much of that scholarship has been focused on general or mainstream populations of students. If research did focus on parents of English learners, the information provided was incomplete. Only recently has research begun to focus on immigrants and parents of ELs with an understanding of the particular considerations these populations face. Barrueco, Smith, and Stephens (2015) note:

> Most parent engagement studies, including those concerned with immigrant families or families speaking a language other than English in the home, provide limited information about parents' language proficiency and about other characteristics that may influence parent engagement: even when more information is provided, most studies have not been able to disentangle the role of English proficiency from other important characteristics affecting parent engagement in linguistically diverse families. (p. 4)

Schools face these challenges and must attend to a myriad of factors in engaging families.

There are questions in the literature with regards to using previously accepted models and theories of parent involvement and efforts to apply them to immigrant and populations of English learners. Han and Love (2015) argue that traditional attempts and old models of parent engagement will not yield significant results with immigrant parents and therefore new and different approaches are needed. Concluding that these older models "do not adequately describe the unique factors affecting immigrant parents … (and they recommend a new model they have titled) Stages of Immigrant Parent Involvement" (p. 22), they propose that immigrant parents and their experiences should be viewed as evolving, and parents should be considered to

be in one of four stages titled *Cultural Survivors, Cultural Learners, Cultural Connectors, and Cultural Leaders*. The early stages (Survivors and Learners) represent families with many cultural and language challenges who most likely know little about the American school system, while the later stages are for those who have grasped a familiarity with the schools and the community, and they can be asked to be cultural leaders. The authors claim that by considering and following a model such as theirs, schools and school systems will be able to identify the needs of parents and families and engage with them in ways that will best support children's learning. These stages are presented in Table 1.

Moreover, Auerbach (2007) is critical of Epstein's model, which she deems a mainstream model that analyzes traditional partnerships between home and school and, as a result, fails to consider mitigating variables that affect parents of color and low-income families. Auerbach notes, "for the past 20 years, parent involvement research, policy, and practice have been dominated by Epstein's model of family-school partnerships" (p. 252). She indicates that this model "fail(s) to account for the needs and experience(s) of many parents of color/low income as well as structural constraints on their actions and relations with schools. The partnership model, for instance, does not address the sense of exclusion that some parents feel at schools and their efforts to protect and advocate for their children" (p. 252).

Instead, Auerbach suggests using the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of Parental Involvement Process (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005) and to consider the empowerment model of Delgado-Gaitan (1991). She argues that the Hoover-Dempsey model is more useful for school leaders to consider as it has a focus on parent role construction and it considers parent perspectives. According to Auerbach, the Hoover-Dempsey model is "grounded in review of educational, developmental, and social psychology research.

Table 1

*Stages of Immigrant Parent Involvement*

| Cultural Survivors | Cultural Learners | Cultural Connectors | Cultural Leaders |
|---|---|---|---|
| Face multiple challenges, and their priority is meeting their family's basic needs. Parents in this stage may be recently arrived immigrants or refugees escaping political unrest or seeking religious freedom. They might be illiterate in their native language and need to work multiple jobs order to maintain the basic needs of food and shelter. With their long hours of work, cultural survivors tend to have very little time, if any, to learn about the U.S. school system and how to navigate it. | Are more comfortable with the new school culture and the U.S. education system. They are engaged in learning about the schools - instruction, curriculum, assessment, school culture, and more. With the help of qualified and trained interpreters and translated documents, parents communicate with schools and learn to navigate the U.S. school system. They feel more comfortable attending workshops in their native language and are likely to participate in parent-teacher conferences with language support. | Develop greater familiarity with the school system, educational terminology and policies and procedures. They share information with cultural survivors and cultural learners about programs and activities that support children and parents. Cultural connectors are able to encourage and empower Cultural Survivors and Cultural Learners to become involved in their children's education. | Are the face and the most resounding voice of their ethnic/language community. Parents in this stage are advocates for Cultural Survivors, Learners, and Connectors. They are able to communicate the needs of immigrant families to schools and community leaders. Participation in leadership programs and trainings support their ability to sharpen their leadership skills and to learn about the roles of parent leaders in schools and districts. Cultural Leaders speak up for immigrant students and families' needs as a voice for voiceless families. |

Note. Adapted from *"Stages of Immigrant Parent Involvement—Survivors to Leaders," by Y. Han and J. Love, 2015.*

This model present(s) current 'best guesses' for why parents get involved, what forms their involvement takes, and how their involvement influences students" (pp. 85-86). She further highlights Delgado-Gaitan's empowerment model, for it "offers an empowerment model of

family-school relations in which power is shared, influence is two-way between home and school, and parties are mutually accommodating, in contrast to the conventional one-way model dominated by the school's needs and expectations" (Auerbach, 2007, p. 254).

Drawing on Hoover-Dempsey's findings that parent-role construction and parents' sense of self-efficacy are the two key predictors to whether or not parents are engaged with their children's education, Auerbach studied the involvement of working-class parents of color who had college aspirations for their high school children in a Los Angeles metropolitan area. Through interviews with these parents, she discovered that "parents spoke about their role in their child's education in broad terms of support rather than the more narrowly conceived, often school based parent-involvement discussed in mainstream literature" (p. 258). She determined that parents fell into one of three categories on a continuum: moral supporters, ambivalent companions, and struggling advocates. Auerbach states:

> Moral Supporters, who emphasized indirect, behind-the-scenes moral support for education at home. At the opposite end of the continuum were the Struggling Advocates, who provided more direct, instrumental support and monitoring at home along with advocacy at school. A third, unexpected category in between, the Ambivalent Companions, offered strong emotional support and occasional direct help but conveyed deeply ambivalent messages about schools and higher education. Similar to the first two categories, the Companions were moving toward college goals for their children but they diverged from the pathway toward other goals, suggesting their ambivalence. (p. 258)

As a result of her research, Auerbach suggests schools re-conceptualize parent involvement of marginalized families:

> Similar to students, parents come to schools with unequal resources for pursuing educational goals and with complex raced/classed/gendered identities, cultural scripts, and family histories or dynamics that shape their relations with institutions. Just as schools need to affirm and accommodate marginalized students, so too, do schools need to transform their understandings of and interactions with working-class parents of color. (p. 276)

Instead of considering mainstream models to gauge or improve parent involvement, she indicates that schools should broaden definitions of parental involvement to include more "open-minded, emic notions of parent support for children's education, advancement, and well-being" (p. 276). Additionally, she adds that multiple forms of support for parents should be considered, schools should work collaboratively to remove barriers and reduce sources of conflict with families, and schools should capitalize on parents desire for information by engaging with them and talking with them about their child's plans for the future (p. 276).

After reviewing literature on Hispanic and Latino parent involvement in K-12 education, Tinkler (2002) found that:

> The reality is that parent involvement must be a collaborative effort. Teachers and administrators need to view parents as integral partners in the academic achievement and well-being of their students and seek to create an environment where parent participation is welcomed and utilized. (p. 19)

Sosa (1996) specifically examined Hispanic families' participation in schools and concurs. She urged school leaders and school personnel to "regard migrant and

immigrant families with *understanding and compassion*" (p. 349). In addition, Sosa (1996) listed forces that "facilitate and support the involvement of Hispanic parents, including the educators allowing for flexible scheduling, providing child care and transportation, and meeting parents outside of the school" (p. 345). School leaders can mindfully organize and develop programs that can assist parents of ELs and potentially improve parent involvement. Barrueco et al. (2015) recommend programs aimed to help parents develop interpersonal relationships with each other by "creating opportunities for parents of similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds to get to know each other … (the authors suggest this) is another program practice that may support parent engagement in early care and education program activities" (pp. 6-7).

## Perspectives of Parents of English Learners

The previous sections reviewed parent involvement, including the value of such involvement and involvement-models specific to immigrants and parents of ELs. The following section considers research specific to the perspectives parents of English learners possess with regards to their children's schooling. Schools and educators in their quest to make efforts to get to know perspectives of parents of ELs, should be aware that there is research to suggest that parents of ELs may bring particular perspectives that are different when compared to the educators who work with their children or what may seem to be more generally accepted, mainstream perspectives. School leaders must consider these different perspectives as well as other variables that can potentially present as barriers to parent involvement within the population of English learners. The following section analyzes the perspectives of parents of English learners. It is divided into two sections. The first section reviews the particular perspectives of parents of English learners given the contextual framework of their experiences

in the United States as immigrants. The second section reviews the comparative viewpoints of parents of ELs.

**Particular Perspectives Based on Context**

Orozco (2008) found that parents' perspectives of their child's educational experiences are seen through the context of their own experiences in their home country. This allows "them to endure difficult situations with the hope of creating a better future for their children" (p. 34). This thinking is in accord with the work of John Ogbu (Ogbu & Simons, 1998) and his cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance. Part of Ogbu's theory suggests "minorities have a positive dual frame of reference, at least during the first generation. One frame of reference is based on their situation in the United States. The second frame of reference is based on their situation 'back home' or in their place of origin" (p. 170). He argues that minorities view their present situation as a positive one because they see more opportunities in the United States and because they migrated to this country with the hope that they would do better than they would have had they stayed in their home country. As a result, they "conclude that they are doing better or are seeing better opportunities for their children in the United States" (p. 170) and believe that any discrimination they may see or perceive is temporary and due to issues they may have with the English language or because they are immigrants.

This context may contribute to parents of ELs struggling to navigate the American educational system. For many, the system is novel. Additionally, parents of ELs may also struggle due to their own possible limited educational backgrounds, which may offer a limited basis for comparison. Ceja (2004) found that "parents' limited educational and occupational backgrounds made it difficult for these parents to tap into their own experiences to engage in educational conversations with their daughters that entailed a specific knowledge base and

understanding of the structure of educational opportunities in this country" (p. 357). Comparing families headed by English-only speakers to those of ELs, Barrueco et al. (2015) list three possible barriers for parents of ELs: (a) linguistically diverse families are more likely to be poor and live in linguistically isolated communities; (b) parents' unfamiliarity with schooling in the United States and language barriers may discourage them from participating; and (c) some immigrants may be undocumented and, therefore, wary of involvement with public agencies and programs while others may be refugees coping with the consequences of dislocation and trauma (p. 4). Zambrana and Zoppi (2002) state the importance of parent involvement but cite a similar obstacle, "parents play an important role in advocating for their children in the school system. Yet, Latino parents tend to be poor and less-educated than other groups and reside in areas where there is less parent leadership and civic engagement around improving schools" (p. 42).

Pstross, Rodríguez, Knopf, and Paris (2016), for their examination of low college enrollment rates for Latino students, studied speeches of graduates involved in a university outreach program designed to help Latino families overcome barriers to college called The American Dream Academy. They noted the normal barriers for Latinos cited include lack of financial resources, problems in communication with schools, and low familiarity with the college planning process (p. 650). Their analysis revealed six additional themes (cited in the speeches of participants) that additionally operated as barricades to parents of ELs: "facing challenges, envisioning success, understanding the school system, taking ownership, community raising a child, and creating a supportive home environment. The findings enrich existing literature and help understand the complex systems that are at play with parental involvement in Latino families" (p. 650).

**Comparative Viewpoints**

There is an abundance of research that exists on parent perceptions of schools where race and/or ethnicity is considered and there is research that sought to define the characteristics of strong, healthy, minority family systems—as opposed to more traditional research that primarily has focused on White, middle-class family systems (Abbott & Meredith, 1988). Moreover, there are numerous examples of other studies that compared attitudes of members of various races and ethnicities toward different school-related variables as a way to provide comparative viewpoints. As an example, Delahunty (2011) compared and reviewed the perceptions of principals and Hispanic parents with regards to their shared responsibilities at school and the home. She found that the school in which she conducted the case study "had experienced large arenas of success in building bridges and tearing down barriers with parents, (but that) they still have a long road ahead to become the 'model school' that the administrators so desire" (p. 109). Complimentary to the efforts of the school leaders and staff, she argued that "their greatest success is their belief and understanding that the language and culture of their students matter and should be respected and integrated into their school community" (p. 109).

In 1998, Stephen Lee studied linguistic minority parents' perceptions and views on bilingual education. Lee scrutinized the attitudes of parents of English learners but only specific to their thoughts toward bilingual education, not to the school or to their children's overall educational experience (p. 9). Lee found that most parents indicated that they understood bilingual programming, but, in reality, few could label the different programs offered. In addition, he discovered that an overwhelming percentage of parents thought their child's teachers should instruct their children in both English and Spanish (p. 10). Finally, most parents supported Two-Way bilingual education.

There is also research that compares the school involvement of parents of English learners in comparison with parents of native English speakers. As an example, Harper and Pelletier (2010) evaluated parents' communication, involvement, and knowledge of their early childhood-aged children's abilities in reading and mathematics and found that parents who were native English-speaking communicated more frequently with the teacher than parents of ELs. However, "teachers reported that although ELL parents communicated less frequently with them compared with EL1 (English as a first language) parents, ELL parents were just as involved in their children's education" (p. 133). Harper and Pelletier (2010) theorized that less frequent communication and involvement by parents of English learners may be attributed to cultural differences and/or their feelings of unpreparedness to assist their child with English reading (p. 134).

This section reviewed the perspectives of parents of English learners. The research indicates that immigrant parents' viewpoints can be influenced by the context of their prior experiences in their home countries. Moreover, a confluence of factors exists that may also impact outlooks and these should be considered when school leaders work to understand the needs and preferences of parents of ELs. Finally, the comparative viewpoints of parents and the educators that serve their children were reviewed. As noted, English learners and their parents can present particular and perhaps unfamiliar needs which the school will need to identify and address. In the following section, research on schools' preparedness to work with these families is reviewed.

## Schools' Preparedness for Working with Families of English Learners

School leaders face a myriad of obstacles to meet the shifting needs of their schools as populations of English learners grow and become more prominent. The following section

reviews schools' levels of preparedness for working with families of English learners. The section examines literature that introduces different variables and considerations that affect how educators welcome and work with bilingual families in schools in the United States. The section is sub-divided into three parts. The first sub-section analyzes the idea of the cultural competence of educators that are tasked with working with English learners. This is followed by an analysis of the concept of cultural humility and its value if one is to believe true cultural competence is unattainable. Finally, social justice is analyzed at the end of the section.

**Cultural Competence**

As schools become more diverse, different variables can act as obstacles for educators to teach children from different parts of the world. DeCapua and Marshall (2011) discuss "Western-style schooling … (and how) people who have fully participated in a Western-style model of education have cognitively different ways of understanding the world" (p. 35). Through their educational and cultural experiences in the West, these students develop a system of classification and information and learn to possess a "'scientific' or 'academic' way of understanding the world" (p. 35). Lave (as cited in DeCapua & Marshall, 2011) delineates that this "scientific or academic approach is not universal (across cultures) or even necessary to learning" (p. 35). English learners' "lack of understanding of and familiarity with academic ways of learning and understanding the world disadvantages them when they enter mainstream U.S. classrooms" (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011, p. 36).

This understanding of the various approaches to education across the globe is a type of cultural competence that is needed if educators are to reach all their students. Jean Moule (2012) defines cultural competence as "the ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than your own. It entails developing certain personal and interpersonal awareness

and sensitivities, learning specific bodies of culture knowledge, and mastering a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching" (p. 5). This interpersonal awareness and these sensitivities are critical when considering efforts to reach families with backgrounds that are different than the mainstream. Differences in cultural competence, or a lack entirely thereof, can certainly act as an impediment to providing ELs with an equal access to an educational system.

Zambrana and Zoppi (2002) found that "all too frequently school personnel are not competent in engaging the cultural values and strengths of (Latino families) and thus their (the parents) cultural capital erodes" (2002, p. 48). Instead, parents of ELs may be viewed using a deficit model by educators—a model where parents' behavior is viewed as not participating at the same level or doing the same things when compared to parents of the dominant culture. Yet there is research to suggest a contrary view. Parents of ELs may be engaged with their children and they may be involved more when compared to the dominant culture, the educators just may not be aware and/or realize it. For instance, as Murphey, Guzman, and Torres, (2014) report, "a higher percentage of Hispanic families regularly eat meals together 6 or 7 times per week than other groups (59% compared with the national average of 46%), two-thirds of Latino teens say their parents praise them for good behavior nearly every day—a higher percentage than either white or black teens report, Latino parents of young children (ages three to five) read, tell stories, sing, work on arts and crafts, and teach letters and numbers" (p. 13). Lee and Bowen (2006) note "teachers may interpret their (parents) lack of involvement as a general lack of interest in their children's education" (p. 210). Orozco (2008) studied Latino parents who volunteered and called into a Latino public radio network to discuss relevant parent issues. He found that "low-income parents are truly concerned about their children, have high hopes for them, and want to be

involved in their children's schooling experiences … they stress education as the way to job success (p. 34). He discovered that in the home, parents "admonish their children to obey their teacher, to do their school work, not to fight, keep trying harder, and so on" (p. 34).

Research suggests that the staff in schools and school systems lack the appropriate understanding to be culturally competent. Professional development has been found to increase teachers' understanding of cultural differences, which can lead to increasing parent engagement. Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, and Hernandez (2003) conducted intensive professional development with a group of teachers who volunteered to participate and learn about the culture and personal histories of the students and the families they serve. The researchers established that "with some professional development on cultural value systems, committed teachers can take important steps to understand families and bring about deepened relationships with parents, greater parent involvement in schooling, and positive effects on students" (p. 66). Additionally, school leaders could also make efforts to hire staff who reflect the culture of the students they serve. Barrueco et al. (2015) note that "bilingual, bicultural program staff appear key to helping parents in linguistically diverse families feel welcome and comfortable with teachers" (p. 6).

**Cultural Humility**

It is important to note that in spite of a school's or an educator's best efforts, there is a reality that true cultural competence may not be attained between every teacher and student given the various backgrounds and cultures from which they come. If this is the case, attempts at achieving and grasping cultural humility are equally important. To understand cultural humility, one must understand that many educators, in the eyes of many students and families, are in an incredible position of power. In the medical field, this phenomenon is more omnipresent in the preparatory work of physicians who are specifically trained to be aware of this and "especially in

the context of race, ethnicity, class, (and) linguistic capability … (they) must be taught to repeatedly identify and remedy the inappropriate exploitation of this power imbalance in the establishment of treatment priorities and health promotion activities" (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998, p. 118).

In the educational field emphasis has historically been focused on multiculturalism, cultural awareness, and learning more about cultural competence. Cultural humility has begun to show up in educational research only in the past few decades. For an educator, cultural humility puts the relationship between teacher and child and educator and parent(s) into a context that yields more understanding and empathy from the school and school personnel. According to Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) cultural humility has three areas of focus for the person in the position of power: (a) continuous self-evaluation and self-critique; (b) desire to fix power imbalances; and (c) commitment to systematically advocate for others (p. 117).

As more children from a greater number of countries enter schools in the United States, educators find it increasingly difficult to have a strong understanding of the various cultures, norms, and expectations of all their diverse students and their parents. After all, in the United States as demographics have shifted, teachers' demographics have predominantly remained White and middle class (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000, p. 34). LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) note that "this is not a problem in itself, but such a mismatch between student demographics and teacher demographics often creates situations in which cultural differences are evident and sometimes conflict. These cultural differences present a potential for real and perceived cultural misunderstanding" (LaRocque et al., 2011, p. 116). Educators minimally need to be aware of this potential cultural misunderstanding as a result of their own standing in the

eyes of the families they are serving. Moreover, if the educators aim to reach all children, they should make efforts to overcome these potential cultural misunderstandings.

Causey et al. (2000) suggest the importance of school leaders being mindful of the importance to train their staffs and for educator preparation programs to "facilitate intercultural sensitivity and learning among prospective teachers" (p. 33). The authors studied the challenges and difficulties to shift educators predisposed attitudes and beliefs. They suggest efforts to create a radical restructuring of these beliefs, which "can lead to the discovery of new paradigms, identification of new core concepts, and/or the creation of new schematic structures. In other words, dramatic changes, or reorganization of one's belief structure can be viewed as a radical restructuring of one's world view" (p. 34). Brown, Vesely, and Dallman (2016) suggest several activities that teacher preparation programs and school leaders can employ to "provide opportunities to develop cultural competence vis-à-vis cultural humility in teacher candidates by uncovering their implicit biases and reflecting on observations of differing cultural and familial backgrounds" (p. 90). These include simulation exercises for educators to recognize stereotypes, implicit biases, and assumptions. Additionally, they suggest reviewing case studies that challenge teacher's beliefs and participating in activities that take educators out of their classrooms, including home visits and community mapping activities (pp. 82-89).

**Social Justice**

In 2009, United States Secretary of Education Arne Duncan stated:

> I believe that education is the civil rights issue of our generation. And if you care about promoting opportunity and reducing inequality, the classroom is the place to start. Great teaching is about so much more than education; it is a daily fight for social justice. (Duncan, 2009)

Katsarou, Picower, and Stovall (2010) define social justice as "the day-to-day processes and actions utilized in classrooms and communities centered in critical analysis, action, and reflection (praxis) amongst all educational stakeholders (students, families, teachers, administrators, community organizations, and community members) with the goal of creating tangible change in their communities, cities, states, nation, and the larger world" (p. 139). In essence, social justice should be the goal of all education: to create situations and environments where all students' needs are met and all students reach their full potential academically and socially. To achieve this goal, the parents of high-needs children, including parents of English learners, must be engaged by schools; they must be a part of the decision-making that school leaders engage in regularly as schools attempt to meet the needs of English learners. These efforts to increase the engagement of parents of ELs in their children's education in the United States are an ardent endeavor in social justice.

To move toward an institution to one that aims for social justice, the educators who work in the school need to teach curricula that are relevant to all populations who attend the school. Woods, Dooley, Luke, and Exley (2014) worked for four years in a school in a satellite city that forms part of the urban sprawl of Brisbane, the capital city of Queensland, Australia. She reported it as being "one of the lowest socioeconomic areas of South East Queensland … (and having) a significant population of Indigenous students, with somewhere between 11% and 15% of the overall student body identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander" (p. 510). Woods et al. explained that the newly-appointed principal of the school was focused on "social justice and equity … (and) reforming the school to achieve improved student learning outcomes" (p. 510). The new principal's appointment coincided with Australia's implementation of a national curriculum for English, mathematics, science, and history; this national curriculum

caused tension with educators who rejected this test-driven accountability, which to them was characterized as scripted teaching. Instead of being merely engrossed in the new standards, Woods et al. concentrated "instead on collaborative planning and teaching with the aim of demonstrating and documenting teacher professionalism and quality teaching with students from linguistic/cultural minority and working class backgrounds" (p. 510).

When the researchers arrived, they described the teaching at the school as lacking any "attention to substantive intellectual demand, to real-world knowledge and to meaningful engagement with the students' outside classroom worlds" (p. 514); according to the authors, efforts to teach to the standards had essentially disallowed any teaching or discussion with regard to several national discourses that were occurring in the country, including a recent 100-year flood, active volcanoes that had halted air travel, debates on climate change, and immigration. By teaching simply to the standards, educators missed opportunities to engage students and parents leading to a disconnect between teachers, students, and the parents in the community.

With the endorsement from the principal, the team met with the staff and emphasized a need for:

> upping the ante under the expectation that students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, some who were still struggling with learning basic skills, were ready and able to discuss 'big ideas,' to engage with discussions and talk about the world around them, and about field and disciplinary knowledge … (Relying on previous work cited by Freebody & Luke (1990), the authors) … made an empirical case that while basic skills (e.g. phonemic awareness and recall) were necessary for improved achievement, these basic skills were not sufficient. (p. 514)

Through collaboration and modeling teaching to these "big(ger) ideas," the researchers changed the teaching paradigm and improved the instruction. Consequently, the researchers found:

> sustainable gains in achievement take time, at least a 3-5-year cycle that can accommodate and generate cultural and discourse change in the staffroom and classroom, professional development and local development of a whole-school literacy curriculum plan, in the context of engagement with the culturally and linguistically diverse community. (Woods et al., 2014, p. 518)

Indeed, attempting to achieve social justice transcends academic instruction in a classroom. By committing to creating an academic environment where social justice is the goal, schools and school leaders need to commit to work that includes levels of parent outreach that are rarely seen in traditional academic experiences. Cazden (2012) researched schools' efforts to recognize parents' cultures and to allow parent representation in the decision-making that occurs within the school. Illuminating in the field, her research gets to the core of the stated problem of this work: when school policy is being dictated by referenda that are decided on in the voting booth, these policies, by definition, fail to take into account minority viewpoints and attitudes of minority populations. Lopez (2012) urges that when schools outreach into the community, engage parents through community organizing, and motivate involvement, school leaders will find that "many times … parents' concerns are not about academic issues, but about children's health, safety, and after school hours, making it critical that organizing groups let parent voices be heard and validated first before tackling issues about classroom learning" (2003).

Yet Ishimaru (2014) recognizes that conventional methods to engage parents in schools can marginalize Latino parents (p. 2). She focused on the work of District-Community organizing efforts as a way to best engage Latino and low-income parents and to give them

relevant social capital with regards to their child's education and fostering educational improvement. Furthermore, she studied a school district in Oregon and discovered that by working with the local community organizing group, the Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality, the new superintendent:

> Shifted the language of accountability in the district—from that of denial (English learners as "Holbrooke's problem") to explicit shared responsibility between all educators and parents ("now in our district, we're responsible for all of the kids"). The district reorganized its structure to bring ELL issues to the core, launched district-wide professional development for teaching ELLs, and provided support, and eventually resources, to the Coalition to educate and empower low-income Latino parents in the district. (p. 23)

Additionally, Ishimaru (2014) discovered that teachers perceived greater parent involvement with the help of the coalition-hosting workshops for historically-marginalized parents. By working with the schools, teachers were perceived to take responsibility for parent outreach that led to "developing structural social capital between parents and teachers" (Ishimaru, 2014, p. 25).

Woods et al. (2014) pronounced that the:

> Recognition of these students (and their parents) and their communities' lifeworlds, values, knowledges and experiences in the curriculum and in the classroom teaching and learning relations is both a means and an end; a means towards improved achievement according to conventional measures and an end goal for reform and revision of mainstream curriculum knowledge and what is made to count as valued knowledge and practice. (p. 510)

Traditional schools in the United States simply fail to foster this "both as a means and an end" philosophy to the extent that it is needed to meet the needs of all children.

An example of an issue where attention is potentially needed to acquire social justice may be to reconsider what happens during the summer months when students are away from school and there is potential for their academic skills to regress.

> What happens over that period of time may be more important to the challenge of creating effective schools than what happens during the school year. And far from being an explanation for why schools can't be effective or for why they are limited in how effective they might be, this needs to be seen as a challenge that schools should help to solve, thereby increasing their effectiveness.
>
> (McNaughton, 2011, p. 77)

McNaughton (2011) cites the work of Heyns (1978) who showed that the "poor and traditionally less well-served communities" (p. 78) were more negatively affected by an academic summer slide that he refers to as the summer learning effect (SLE). By reviewing the SLE longitudinally, he determined that gaining a fully matched distribution of achievement is a very difficult proposition over the long term (p. 79). Involving parents as true partners in their children's education and focusing on the 'summer slide' are all efforts that need more attention. Clearly, schools and educators need to take on this responsibility.

Gaining cultural competence, having cultural humility, and understanding that engaging parents of ELs is imperative to the improvement of the educational experiences of their children are important ideas with which schools need to grapple. Engaging with community organizations may be a welcome step for school systems to recognize that there are marginalized groups in the community, and it is their obligation to change structures and systems to give all

parents social capital. Giving parents voice and working with them can only improve the school's ability to (a) identify the real needs of English learners and their parents, and (b) create ideas and solutions to meet these needs. This study aims to do just that: to hear the attitudes and to understand the expectations of parents of English learners to best serve their needs.

## Summary

This chapter addressed existing scholarship that is foundational for this study. Literature was reviewed and presented to provide information to orient the reader in understanding bilingual education, the influence parent participation has on student achievement, models, theories, and ideas regarding parents of ELs and their participation with their children's education. In addition, research was presented to illuminate the perceptions of parents of ELs with regards to their children's schooling experiences. The literature review establishes that families with English learners have particular needs and older models of parent involvement and engagement may not be reflective of these needs and thus, newer models should be considered when studying these phenomena. Moreover, the literature presented displays the importance of schools' preparedness in their capacity and ability to work with families of English learners by exploring concepts such as cultural competence and cultural humility. Finally, the chapter ends by reviewing literature noting the responsibilities of schools to be intentional in efforts to create socially just environments conducive to all children having equitable access to positive learning experiences.

# CHAPTER 3 - METHODS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions and beliefs of parents of English learners about the schooling of their elementary-aged children, the expectations they have for their children's education, and their understanding of their role with regards to their children's education. Exploring the relationship parents have with the school and with their child's education, the study, furthermore, recognizes the need to glean more information from parents: namely, to hear the parents' perspectives about the challenges their children encounter while becoming proficient in English and meeting academic performance expectations. The study is focused on a specific population: Spanish-speaking parents of children enrolled in a program for English learners (ELs) in an elementary school in the United States.

This chapter presents the research methods used in the study by explaining the design of the study, the role of the researcher, and the methods used to collect and analyze data. Additionally, it delineates the way in which the data collection tools were created, tested, and administered and describes the processes through which the participants, the settings, and the approach(es) were used in the data analysis. At the end of the chapter, a summary is presented.

The study addresses the following questions:

1. How knowledgeable about the American school system and American schooling are immigrant Spanish-speaking parents? What do they not understand, and what do they want to understand better?
2. What do Spanish-speaking parents of children enrolled in a program serving English learners in a U.S. elementary school want for their children from the school? What do they regard as the most important ways in which they can support their child's education?

3. What are parents' perceptions about the experiences their children have at school, and what do they want the school to know about their children so their children have positive experiences at school?

## General Aspects of Research Design

This was a qualitative study that used a phenomenological method. This approach was chosen in an effort to describe "meaning for several individuals of their *lived experience* ... as they experience a phenomenon (being immigrants, Spanish-speaking, and parents of elementary school aged English learners)" (Creswell, 2007, pp. 57-58). The purpose was to understand a common experience of parents and to provide a common account of their perspective(s). The "phenomenon" in this phenomenological approach is the experience of being a first-generation immigrant, native Spanish-speaker, parent of a child or children in elementary school. Moustakas (1994) states, "because all knowledge and experience are connected to phenomena, things in consciousness that appear in the surrounding world, inevitably a unity must exist between ourselves as knowers and the things or objects that we come to know or depend upon" (p. 44). This study is an attempt at better understanding this phenomenon and increasing the understanding of the knowledge and experience surrounding it.

The voices of parents of ELs are historically and traditionally under-represented in educational reform discussions both at the federal level as well as in many local schools and districts. Moreover, parents of ELs struggle to have a voice with regards to their children's educational experiences. As Good, Masewicz, and Vogel (2010) note, "we suspect that the power and influence Hispanic parents can have on their children's education has been ignored by many and underestimated by most" (pp. 322 - 323). This theoretical stance is the underpinning of this study. Good et al. (2010) found that both parents and teachers show frustration with a

struggle to communicate well. There is research on parents' expectations for their children's schooling, but, as Dick Carpenter (as cited in Jeynes, 2010) points out, "much of this research has been conducted with predominantly Caucasian, middle class, children but comparatively fewer with ethnically diverse student groups" (p. 163). Moreover, Good et al. (2010) found that "parents expressed a great desire to advocate for their children but felt that schools did not, or would not, listen to them" (2010, p. 329). As noted in Chapter 1, ELs are the fastest growing subgroup of children in the United States, and Spanish-speaking ELs make up 60% of the language-minority population. Undoubtedly, this is a critical juncture in the field of education, offering a momentous opportunity not only to take a fresh look at ELs and their parents' perceptions of their children's schooling but also to inquire deeply about this relatively new phenomenon instead of using existing frameworks for considering parental perspective.

In order to create a composite description, this study attempts to capture parents of English learners' thoughts, ideas, and understandings of the American school system, the way in which they perceive their child(ren)'s experiences at school, and what they seek from the school. This composite should help inform school leaders and educators as they strive to best serve the growing number of families who share these experiences and concerns.

An issue-focused and generalized approach (Weiss, 1994, p. 152) was employed while coding and performing data analysis. The issues are the attitudes and perspectives of parents of ELs, and in the analysis attempts were made to generalize these findings in order to assist educational leaders and classroom practitioners establish a mutual relationship of understanding and collaboration with the students' parents. Through these methods, efforts were made to hear and gauge the attitudes, opinions, and expectations of a group of parents whose children share a

similar experience in school—children who historically and presently struggle to perform well, as measured by state proficiency exams.

## Role of Researcher

Because of my own socio-cultural background, growing up in a community where English was not the first language spoken by many of my friends' and classmates' parents, I am committed to working with families of ELs since my experiences orient me for this work. I am the principal in the school where the research was conducted; I am also the researcher for this study. Aware that these dual roles could lead to bias, it was imperative that I make intentional and deliberate efforts to control for partiality and ensure that the work and my intentions were clear throughout the process. I attempted to accomplish this in three ways by being: (a) aware of cultural differences; (b) transparent; and (c) mindful of potential biases.

The role of the researcher is to earn the trust of the subjects and to be mindful that the roles of principal and researcher are clearly distinguished. This was accomplished in the best manner possible by planning for it throughout the process. First, I am cognizant that, as a Portuguese-American, I am from a different culture from that of the participants in the study. Therefore, during each step of the development of the data collection tools as well as during the execution of both the questionnaire and the interviews, I attempted to be culturally sensitive and aware of any present differences. Endeavoring not to judge either responses or the parents with whom I was working, I strove fully to be present and attentive to put participants at ease and, therefore, allow them the opportunity to share their stories openly and honestly. Second, I was aware of the need to be transparent with: (a) my school district (I was required to obtain permission after writing a proposal and applying through the school's IRB board for my research to be conducted in the district); (b) my staff who were informed of my actions, reasons, and

plans at a staff meeting in the late winter of 2015 (see Appendix C – Talking Points); and (c) the parents whom I invited to participate. Third, mindful of potential biases, I considered my role as principal at each step of the process; namely, I was proactively aware that I was working with parents whose children attended the school where I was principal and that I was an educator asking research questions specific to my field. Prior to both the questionnaire and the interview(s), I stressed that I was there to hear participants' perspectives, and I sincerely wanted to understand their perspectives. I emphasized that for this research to have validity the participants needed to separate my roles of researcher and principal. Moreover, my questions were written and rewritten in a manner that considered potential biases and sought to elicit the participants' unadulterated responses.

## Setting

I chose to do the study with a subgroup of parents in the school where I am the principal. The school is an elementary school with over 500 students in grades kindergarten through grade five. This is one of the nine public elementary schools in the town. The school is located in a large town with over 68,000 residents, located about 20 miles from an urban center in the northeastern United States. The town is diverse economically, racially, and ethnically. While some parts of the town are considered urban, other parts are deemed suburban. Although the median income for a household in the town is $54,288, and the median income for a family is $67,420, this statistic fails to represent the true economic diversity of the town as there are several neighborhoods with tremendous wealth and others with severe poverty.

The town has a high percentage of English learners and a large Hispanic population. Forty-one percent of the district's students do not have English listed as their first language, and nineteen percent of the students are enrolled in bilingual programs; these percentages are even

higher at the elementary school where the parents were selected to participate. In this school, English is not the first language for fifty-seven percent of students, and forty percent are enrolled in a bilingual program. The overwhelming majority of the English learners at the school (over eighty percent) speak Spanish in the home (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017).

## Participants

The participants were parents of elementary-aged children (kindergarten through grade 4) for whom, as noted on their enrollment forms, Spanish was the primary language used in the home. Participants were also all first-generation immigrants to the United States (either as children or adults), and all of the parents in the study had at least one child in a language-learning program (either in sheltered English immersion or in transitional bilingual education) at the school.

This research was conducted with the parents of children who attend the elementary school where I am the principal. I chose to do this in the school where I work because I have become increasingly aware of how difficult it is to hear and understand the attitudes and thoughts of Spanish-speaking, parents of ELs since there can be many obstacles to overcome. First, there is the obvious language obstacle; because I am not bilingual, throughout the process I had to rely on others to assist me with both translating and interpreting. Second, and more importantly, the onerous responsibilities borne by parents, such as juggling work and parenthood, made the scheduling of meetings difficult.

Being aware that using parents from the school in which I was employed could potentially lead to biases, deliberate steps were taken and measures employed to control and avoid such biases (see Role of Researcher above). Furthermore, I anticipated that I would be

better able to access parents with the target demographic characteristics and thereby to collect data on their attitudes by reaching out to parents possessing a familiarity with the researcher and an association with the school. Thirty-eight parents participated in a questionnaire, and from that group ten parents were later interviewed.

It is noted that this study involved parents of children who attend just one school, and, consequently, the findings may not be applicable to other schools or to other parents of English learners. In spite of this potential limitation, this research is, nonetheless, focused on the voices of those who often go unheard, unnoticed, and unrecognized in today's communities and schools.

Data were initially collected and reviewed through the administration of a questionnaire, and then follow-up interviews were conducted. Each tool and the way in which each tool was used are described in detail below. As further explained below, both of these tools, the questionnaire and the follow-up interviews, were piloted prior to their implementation. In addition, the Lesley University Institutional Review Board as well as the school district's local Institutional Review Board approved the research. All participants provided voluntary consent for each experience when data were collected.

## Data Collection

### Data Collection Instruments

The main data collection instrumental devices employed were (a) a questionnaire administered at a bilingual parent meeting (see Appendices D and E) from which a sample group was chosen among volunteers, and (b) an interview protocol (Appendix G). Both instruments were specifically developed for this study. Since the target caregivers were Spanish-speaking, district-approved translators were hired to assist in translating the questionnaire. The

questionnaire was offered in either Spanish or English. An interpreter was present for all the interviews, and interpreted all questions into Spanish and all Spanish responses into English.

Both the questionnaire and the interview were first piloted and each followed a predesigned protocol created by the researcher (see Appendix J). The pilots served two purposes. First, the questions and the participants' responses were reviewed. During this review, it was discovered that some questions might not have elicited the participants' stories, perceptions, and/or attitudes as they were intended, so, as a result, they were rewritten. This review was also a way to establish confidence that the process and the questions were culturally sensitive and appropriate. Second, with both instruments, the techniques in both the administration of the questionnaire and the manner in which the candidates were interviewed were drastically improved so as to remove any bias and avoid leading questions.

The purpose of the design of both the questionnaire and the interviews was to answer the three research questions. Several times throughout the process, questions were reviewed and aligned with the research questions in an effort to make sure all questions and sub-questions were potentially addressed and that the tools were streamlined in avoiding irrelevant questions.

**Questionnaire.**

***Process for development and piloting.*** The questionnaire was piloted with six Spanish-speaking, mothers of ELs from an elementary school located 15 miles outside of an urban center in the Northeastern United States. This city has similar demographics to the town where the study was eventually conducted, but it is about half the size. The meeting was an hour and a half in duration; a designed protocol was followed whereby the researcher introduced himself (and the interpreter), introduced the research, and explaining that the purpose of the study was to learn about participants' perspectives on their child(ren)'s schooling. The interpreter travelled with the

researcher to the meeting; she translated the instructions at the beginning of the meeting, was available to answer any questions while the participants were responding to the questionnaire as well as after the questionnaire was completed for a "question and answer" period and a debrief. For the piloting, the instrument was administered in a pencil and paper format. The data from this experience was used to hone the questionnaire to ensure better that the research questions were being effectively addressed.

The participants had no specific questions about the research, but the parents seemed very grateful as all six mothers expressed gratitude, without any prompting or solicitation, for granting them the opportunity to participate. Some parents uttered a somewhat wistful wish for more opportunities to share thoughts about their children's schooling. To elicit their thoughts about the experience of answering the questionnaire, participants were asked the following:

1. How did you like the questionnaire (and why)?
2. Do you feel this opportunity has given you a chance to communicate and share something you would want the school to know?
3. Were there any questions in the survey
    a. That you did not understand?
    b. That made you feel uncomfortable?
    c. Please explain…
4. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about the questionnaire?
    a. Anything else you would like me to know about you or your child(ren)?
    b. Anything I did not ask that you wish I had asked?

Answers to these questions helped the researcher hone existing questions and create new questions. They also were used to modify the design of the questionnaire so that it was culturally sensitive and followed a logical and easy-to-understand sequence.

***Questionnaire items.*** Translated into Spanish and composed of thirty-three items and six pages in length (when printed on paper), the questionnaire was an online survey form administered through a web-based software program called *Qualtrics Metrics*. Addressing the research questions, the questionnaire elicited responses to questions of a general nature that then guided the formulation of the interview protocol. Parents were given the choice of taking the survey in Spanish or English either via paper and pencil or electronically on a PC or Chromebook. Additionally, participants were given the option to use either Spanish or English as they completed the questionnaire or toggle between both languages during the process. A school district-approved translator later translated the Spanish questionnaire responses into English. Questionnaire items and responses were reviewed and coded to coincide with the research questions. These responses guided the creation of questions for the interview(s) as well as the protocol that was ultimately used for the interviews. All participants signed a consent form (see Appendix F).

**Interview protocol.**

***Process for development and piloting.*** Based on the dominant themes from the questionnaire responses, an interview protocol was developed. Interview questions were drafted and cross-referenced with the research questions. The interview protocol was piloted in an effort to establish whether or not the questions were understood and if the responses could potentially illuminate the research questions. The protocol in its entirety was piloted at the public library located in the downtown area of the town. The researcher, with an interpreter, piloted the

interview with two participants who had children who were English learners from a different elementary school in the district possessing very similar demographics to those of the school where the research was to be conducted. The interviews were audiotaped. At the end of each interview, general questions were asked about the interview experience, such as: "How did you like the interview and why?", "Do you feel this opportunity has given you a chance to communicate something you would want the school to know?", and "Were there any questions you wish were asked to help best understand your thoughts about your child's school experience?". Using notes as well as the participants' actual responses to questions, the researcher reworked the protocol and the questions and then conducted an additional pilot with one parent of an elementary-aged EL to test the revised questions.

***Interview questions and protocol.*** Ten parents were selected for follow-up interviews. A school district-approved interpreter accompanied the researcher to all interviews, translating the consent form and interpreting throughout the interview. All participants signed the consent form (see Appendix I) and verbally gave permission to be audiotaped. Interviews were audiotaped, and then data were later transcribed. Toward the end of the interview, in an effort to seek more of their perspective, a generative prompt was provided to elicit additional statements about schooling both in their native country and in the United States. Parents were asked to draw two pictures and they were requested to include the following in their illustrations: "CHILD," "PARENT," "TEACHER," "FAMILY," and "SCHOOL." These terms were listed on a card for them to use as a reference (see Appendix H). Participants were asked to do draw an illustration using these terms for schooling in their native country as well as for schooling in the United States.

The researcher designed the instrumentation, administered the questionnaire, and conducted the interviews.

## Data Collection Procedures

### Questionnaire.

***Selection of participants.*** School demographic data were reviewed using the school's electronic student information system (Aspen – X2) to identify parents who reported that Spanish is spoken as the primary language in the home and whose children are in a bilingual program. Parents of students in grades kindergarten through grade 4 were considered. A flyer, in both English and Spanish, was sent to approximately two hundred and forty parents and caregivers (see Appendices A and B), inviting them to a Bilingual Parents Meeting that was held before the start of the school's Open House night in the spring of 2015. Over fifty parents and caregivers attended the meeting; thirty-eight people accepted the invitation to stay and took the survey at the end of the meeting.

***Setting.*** The questionnaire was administered at the end of the school's Bilingual Parents Meeting between 6 p.m. and 7 p.m., prior to the Open House, in the school's Library/Computer Lab. During the Bilingual Parents Meeting, the staff reviewed the summer programming available for English learners as well as the summer reading program to be held on a weekly basis at the town library, and at the end of the meeting parents were introduced to the research work and asked if they wished to participate in the survey.

By participating in the meeting at 6 p.m., parents were still able to participate fully in the Open House. At the meeting, three colleagues (the English language development (ELD) coach, a bilingual teaching assistant, and the math coach) assisted the parents and the researcher by explaining the summer and reading programs and by translating the researcher's introduction and

the explanation of the survey. Prior to the administration of the questionnaire, the researcher introduced himself, emphasized the need to separate his role as principal from his role as researcher, and stressed that the questionnaire was optional and that participants could stop at any time. To allow parents the ability to opt-out of participation discreetly, they were offered a chance to leave the meeting and tour the school, take a paper questionnaire home and return it in Friday-folders with their child, stay and complete a paper and pencil questionnaire, or respond to the questionnaire on a computer. Parents and caregivers who participated were also given the option of addressing an envelope if they were interested in being mailed a copy of a summary of the completed findings. In an effort to get more parents to attend, raffles were held as part of the Bilingual Parents Meeting and for a summer scholarship to a summer program, gift cards to a local grocery store, and gift cards to a local coffee shop.

The questionnaire was uploaded on *Qualtrics* software and made available to the researcher through the World Wide Web. Parents had the option of responding using a paper and pencil questionnaire, on a personal computer (PC), or a Chromebook. All participating parents chose to complete the questionnaire using a PC or a Chromebook. Two parents wanted to complete the survey on the Chromebook, like their peers, and asked for assistance with using the device. They were allowed to take questionnaire in this manner, but direction was given to the researcher's colleagues that they could not influence responses in any way. In other words, the colleagues were allowed to assist but could only read the question(s) and offer assistance with the computer. This was explained to the participants so they would not feel as though the educators were being unhelpful or rude. This decision was made so as not to exclude parents from participating due to their possibly limited computer skills (and potentially their limited literacy skills). In the end, thirty-eight parents took the questionnaire.

**Interviews.**

***Selection of participants.*** Twenty-seven caregivers who participated in the questionnaire indicated a willingness to be interviewed at a later date. Of the twenty-seven participants, thirteen left complete contact information that made it possible to reach them to attempt to schedule interviews. After contacting all thirteen participants, arrangements were successfully made to meet with ten. The ten participants' names, sex, language(s) spoken, relationship to their child, native country, and their number of children are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

*Participant Descriptive Data*

| Participant | Sex | Language(s) | Relationship to Child | Native Country | # of Children |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lara | Female | Spanish and English | Mother | Puerto Rico | 1 |
| Manuel | Male | Spanish | Father | Puerto Rico | 1 |
| Hugo | Male | Spanish | Father | Puerto Rico | 2 |
| Elena | Female | Spanish | Mother | Puerto Rico | 2 |
| Maria | Female | Spanish | Mother | El Salvador | 3 |
| Sofia | Female | Spanish | Mother | Guatemala | 2 |
| Nina | Female | Spanish and English | Mother | Dominican Republic | 1 |
| Katia | Female | Spanish | Mother/ Aunt | Puerto Rico | 2 |
| Ramon | Male | Spanish | Father | Mexico | 2 |
| Norberto | Male | Spanish and English | Father | El Salvador | 1 |

***Setting.*** Although the original plan was to schedule and host interviews in the town's public library downtown, the library became unavailable necessitating that alternative arrangements be made. Many of the parents who had agreed to be interviewed lived on the south

side of town (close to the library) and transportation became a potential impediment to meeting in other venues in the community. As a result, attempts were made to find a venue that was located within close proximity to the library, that was a public space, and accessible after school hours while also providing a sense of safety for parents. Consequently, arrangements were made with one of the middle school principals, whose school was geographically located in this part of the community and not far from the original library location, to use her school's conference space. Eight parents were interviewed at this middle school, and two parents, who made a particular request, were interviewed at the elementary school where their children attended. These two interviews took place in the school's library after school hours.

**Data Management**

**Security measures.** All stored information, drafts, and other electronic data were kept on the researcher's personal computer. Interviews were audiotaped onto a portable digital recorder. They were then uploaded to the researcher's personal computer. The researcher transcribed the data from the audio files of the first five interviews and five were sent off to a transcription service. The files were sent through a website that encrypted and securely uploaded the file to the transcription service. The completed questionnaires are stored on a web-based service to which only the researcher has access with a password. Finally, the software application used to analyze the qualitative date, DeDoose, was also secured with a password that only the researcher could access.

Only first names were used in the interviews, so there were no further identification markers. Pseudonyms were created for all participants and used in this dissertation. If a participant used their child's name it was redacted. Questionnaires were anonymous; however, participants were given the option to include information to be contacted for interviews.

Pseudonyms were also created for the two schools that participants discussed in their responses. The "Washington School" is the pseudonym used for the elementary school where the participants' children attend. This school offers transitional bilingual education (TBE) and sheltered English immersion (SEI) programs for ELs. Approximately 60% of the students attending this school identify a language other than English as the primary language in the home; in these homes 95% of the families identify Spanish as the primary language. The "Kennedy School" is the pseudonym used for a different elementary school in the district with demographics very similar to the school where the participants' children attend, but this school is a Two-Way bilingual school. Names of particular schools and the districts that are mentioned in consent forms, flyers, and invites in the appendix have all been redacted.

## Data Analysis

The questionnaire yielded responses that were relevant to each of the research questions. The aggregate responses were reviewed when they were quantifiable and each open response reply was read. Common themes were sought and the responses were organized in a manner so that they could be compared to the responses associated with the research questions. This was done to ensure that the research questions were, in fact, being addressed. Also, data and research question displays were created to compare the questions that were asked and the responses that were received, with the research questions. After the review and comparisons were completed, the interview questions were drafted.

The interviews took place over a span of two weeks; each one was audiotaped, and they lasted between 35 minutes and 65 minutes. The interviews were translated in "real-time" as the interpreter, who was present at each interview, was instructed to repeat, in English, exactly what the participants were saying to the best of her ability. The researcher transcribed the data from

the first five interviews, and the other five were emailed to a transcription service and returned within two weeks. In order to check the accuracy of the real-time translations, three audio files were randomly chosen and shared with a different translator who was tasked with transcribing the Spanish responses of participants into English. Her transcriptions were then checked with the real-time transcriptions. Other than shifts in pronoun use and tenses, there were no marked differences, supporting the accuracy of the on-site interpreter.

After receiving the interviews that were transcribed by the outside service, the researcher compared them to the audio files and reviewed them for accuracy. As each transcription was read for the first time, the audio was re-listened to in order to "proof" the transcription as well as to listen for any nuanced emotions, pauses or any possible ideas that might have been missed during the transcription process. If there were any, they were noted on the transcription. Additionally, from the first reading of the first transcription, an open coding system was followed and code categories were noted. Different passages were highlighted with potential codes. Guidance from Weiss (1994) was used to begin coding each transcription as it was read for the first time. The initial categories that were created were simply "efforts to capture the interview material … (the researcher did not) try to make sense of every "meaning unit"—every utterance of a complete thought—nor of every sentence or paragraph" (p. 155). Upon finishing with the first reading of all ten interviews, over 30 code categories were created.

During each of these readings, each participant was assigned descriptor characteristics, such as sex, relationship to child, country of origin, etc., that could be reviewed (see Table 2). The initial read-through, the notation of nuances, the proofing, the assignment of the descriptors, and the creation and application of the initial coding categories took four weeks. The coding and

assignment of descriptors were logged electronically using DeDoose, a secure, cross-platform, qualitative data-analysis application.

After completing the first reading, the researcher created codes that were studied and reviewed the notes that were taken. During this review, patterns were sought and different categories were considered, including how they could potentially inter-relate, or, alternatively, the manner in which they could possibly not. Each transcript was read a second time and re-coded, collapsing some of the previous code categories and expanding others. During this second read-through, the research questions were routinely referred to and the possible ways in which the responses and code categories related to each other were considered. When completing the second reading, the researcher recognized that several coded passages did not fall neatly into any particular category. This prompted the need for further reflection on the existing codes and in some cases, additional codes to be created. Within each code, all the passages were reread and reviewed. As these were read, codes were sorted and categorized in an attempt to develop themes. These themes established the basis of the findings described in Chapter 4.

The transcripts were re-read a third time, this time being mindful of both the research questions as well as the codes that were established. It was during this third read-through that the outline for Chapter 4 was created, and actual content was considered to be included in support of themes that had been established.

## Summary

This chapter presents the research methods, design, and procedures of this qualitative study. The rationale for using a phenomenological approach is explained. Moreover, the role of the researcher, the choice of setting, and the selection of participants are also explained. The processes used to collect data, both the questionnaire and the interview, are described and the

steps taken are laid out. Lastly, the procedures where the researcher analyzed the data are described and display the way in which a phenomenological approach was followed.

# CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of parents of English learners about their elementary-aged children's schooling, their expectations for their children's education, and their understanding of their role with regard to their children's education. The study explores parents' understanding of the American school system as well as the relationship parents have with the school and with their child's education and more specifically, seeks to illuminate the hopes and dreams parents hold for their children and the ways that they make sense of and engage with their children's educational experiences.

The following research questions guided the investigation of this study:

1. How knowledgeable are immigrant Spanish-speaking parents about the American school system and American schooling? What do they not understand, and what do they wish to understand better?
2. What do Spanish-speaking parents of children enrolled in a program serving English learners in a U.S. elementary school want for their children from the school? What do they regard as the most important ways in which they can support their child's education?
3. What are parents' perceptions about the experiences their children have at school, and what do they want the school to know about their children to enhance their experiences at school?

Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the data collected to address each of the main research questions and presents the findings derived from that analysis. The data from two data sources, a questionnaire and interviews, are analyzed. The design of this study was informed by using a phenomenological methods approach; the phenomenon is the experience of being first-

generation, Spanish-speaking parents who have children in a public elementary school. The chapter is divided into two parts. In the section entitled *Participant Profile,* descriptive data of the participants are presented to introduce the parents and caregivers whose accounts appear throughout the chapter. Additionally, the different program options from which parents of ELs had to choose are described in this section. In the second section entitled *Data Analysis*, data are presented and organized to address the three research questions, and findings are identified at the end of each section as they relate to the research questions. A summary is provided at the end of the chapter.

## Participant Profile

A questionnaire was administered to 38 parents/caregivers in the spring of 2015; ten of these parents/caregivers were then interviewed in January of 2016. All participants shared similar characteristics: having elementary-aged children who are English learners and having Spanish as their native language. All participants were caregivers of at least one student in the same elementary school. Additionally, all participants were Spanish-speaking and had migrated to the United States. Though this group shared these common characteristics, there was, nonetheless, demographic diversity amongst the group which is essential to illuminate.

Of the 38 questionnaire participants, 26 identified their relationship to the child as being the child's mother (68%). Eight were fathers (21%), two were sisters (5%), one listed herself as a grandmother (2%) and one noted her relationship as "other" (2%). In a subsequent interview, the participant who described herself as "other" explained that her children refer to her as both mom and aunt and that she uses the terms interchangeably as her sister sent the children to this country to be in her care. Of the ten participants interviewed, four were fathers (40%), four were mothers (40%), one was a grandmother (10%), and one participant referred to herself as a

mother/aunt (10%). Table 3 displays the number and percentage of questionnaire and interview participants' relationships to their children for each category. As described in Chapter 3, all relatives who identified as being the children's caregivers are referred to as "parents" in this document.

Table 3

*Participants' Relationship to Children*

| | Mother | Father | Grandmother | Sister | Mother/Aunt | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Questionnaire | 26 (68%) | 8 (21%) | 1 (2%) | 2 (5%) | 1 (2%) | 38 (100%) |
| Interview | 4 (40%) | 4 (40%) | 1 (10%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (10%) | 10 (100%) |

A majority of the participants for both the questionnaire and the interviews identified themselves as female. Thirty of the caregivers who participated in the questionnaire identified as female (79%); eight identified as male (21%). Six females (60%) and four males (40%) were interviewed. Twenty-seven participants noted their willingness to be interviewed on the questionnaire, however only 13 left accurate contact information. The 13 were placed in an order using a random number chart. Starting from the top of the random number list, participants were contacted by the interpreter on behalf of the researcher to make arrangements and set up interview appointments. Ten participants were able to attend an interview. This process yielded a different proportion of males to females who were interviewed compared to the percentages of participants who in fact completed the questionnaire (40% males interviewed—21% males completed the questionnaire, 60% females interviewed—79% females completed the questionnaire). This information is displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

*Gender Identity of Participants*

| | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Questionnaire | 8 (21%) | 30 (79%) | 38 |
| Interviews | 4 (40%) | 6 (60%) | 10 |

The participants emigrated from various countries. Though country of origin was not requested on the questionnaire, it was sought in the interviews; among the interviewees, there were five participants originally from Puerto Rico (50%), two from El Salvador (20%), and one from Guatemala, Dominican Republic, and Mexico (10% each), respectively, as shown in Table 2. Consistent with the stated purpose of the study concerning the perspectives of Spanish-speaking parents of ELs, 35 (92%) of the participants on the questionnaire reported that they spoke Spanish in their home; three (8%) reported that they spoke both Spanish and English. Among the interviews, seven (70%) participants reported they spoke Spanish in the home; three (30%) reported they spoke Spanish and English. These data concerning home language are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5

*Language(s) Spoken in the Home*

| | Spanish | Spanish and English |
|---|---|---|
| Language(s) identified as spoken in the home on questionnaire | 35 (92%) | 3 (8%) |
| Language(s) identified as spoken in the home during interview | 7 (70%) | 3 (30%) |

Participating parents encountered different program options when registering their children in this school district. Because different programs were housed in different schools, this also impacted school options. The children of families who report a language other than English

spoken in the home take language assessment tests (both in their native language and in English) during the registration process at the Parent Information Center to determine whether or not they are considered English learners and, therefore, eligible to receive services from the bilingual department.

This district offers several different options for ELs and their families. There are two schools that primarily serve Spanish-speaking families. One school, the Kennedy School, has a Two-Way Bilingual program and the other school, the school where the participants' children attend, the Washington School, has a Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) program as well as Sheltered English Instruction (SEI), which serves students with many different home languages. Through the district's school choice program, SEI students' families have the option to send their child to any one of the eight elementary schools in the district that have SEI-trained teachers, but most of these children end up attending the Washington School. Families are also given the option to "opt-out" and not have their child receive services, though state regulations require the district to report these students' progress on their annual bilingual education reports.

The children of the participants in this study all attend the Washington School. The two bilingual programs at this school are considered "subtractive" programs. Though students in the Transitional Bilingual Education program receive instruction in their native language (Spanish) until they score a three or higher on their statewide ACCESS for ELLs test (English acquisition test), the school does not work to develop or maintain Spanish proficiency once students move into the Sheltered English Instruction program. The TBE and SEI programs are both considered "subtractive" programs—the school does not take responsibility for the children to continue to develop in their native language, in these cases, Spanish. Both programs either teach children grade-specific content in their native language (TBE) or in an English-only setting (SEI) while

concurrently teaching the children English through English Language Development lessons. The goal of both programs is for children to improve their English language proficiency in order to access the curriculum in English. In TBE programs, coursework is meant to develop Spanish proficiency until the child scores a 3 or better on their ACCESS test, followed by a transition into the SEI program. Once in the SEI program, there is no coursework to develop a child's Spanish language. These program differences are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6

*Language Learning Education Program Types*

| Program type and/or parent choice | Additive/ Subtractive | School(s) in the district | Process/Goals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Transitional Bilingual - Spanish | Subtractive | Washington School | ELs learn content in their native language while also learning English. When English proficient, they transition to English instructional content (SEI). Goal is to learn in English. |
| Sheltered English Immersion | Subtractive | All schools (8) except the Kennedy School | ELs learn content in English while also learning English in ELD classes. Few, if any, native language supports. Goal is to learn in English. |
| 2-Way Bilingual | Additive | Kennedy School | ELs learn content in their native language as well as in English. Goal is to be bilingual and to learn in both languages. |
| "Opt-out" | Subtractive | All schools (8) except the Kennedy School | ELs receive no native language or ESL supports. Students immersed in English only classes. Goal is to learn in English. |

## Data Analysis

In this section data are organized and presented as they pertain to the three research questions. In reviewing the information from the questionnaire responses and analyzing interview transcripts, the data were originally categorized per meaning units discovered through the coding process. These units were then clustered and concentrated to show similarities and differences and the frequency of related ideas. Eventually, themes were recognized, categorized, and named. Findings for each research question are presented at the end of each section, and overall findings are summarized at the end of the chapter.

### Data Relevant to Research Question 1

The first research question sought to reveal the participants' understanding about American schools and those aspects that they wished to understand better. Specifically, Research Question 1 reads, *How knowledgeable are immigrant Spanish-speaking parents about the American school system and American schooling? What do they not understand, and what do they wish to understand better?* This section reviews facets of the school experience from parents' perspectives and describes their understanding of these facets of American schooling as well as the many ways in which they attempt to make sense of them.

Asking parents directly what they understood or did not understand about American schooling was a too-general approach as a means to receiving a response to these questions. This type of direct questioning could potentially cause participants to feel as though they were being "quizzed" by the researcher seeking "correct" answers. In an effort to increase participants' comfort level in responding, questions were asked about a variety of common school-related procedures and experiences. These questions provided opportunities for participants to comment about their experiences with regards to specific aspects of American schooling. Through their

accounts, an explanation of their understanding of the American educational system was constructed. As the following analysis shows, their responses revealed an eagerness to engage in and inquire about the details of school practices. Additionally, participants' responses exhibited some lack of awareness about particular idiosyncrasies in the American educational system, including the tacit meanings of some schooling practices and procedures.

Data relevant to the first research question are reported according to four categories: (a) parents' understanding that language and cultural difference may be a barrier for them; (b) parents' understanding of their role in making choices about their children's education; (c) parents' understanding of school routines, including their own patterns of interaction with the school; and (d) parents' understanding of assessments and how they affect their children. Data pertinent to these four areas are presented and analyzed below.

**Understanding language and cultural difference may be a barrier.** For many participants, the enrollment and student registration process was their first experience with American schooling. To understand the enrollment procedures and options, parents needed to be able to communicate with school representatives during the registration process. Based on their accounts of learning about and choosing the school and language program for their children, parents' responses reveal that language was a recurring factor affecting their understanding of American schooling. According to the data, parents expressed recognition that their own levels of English language proficiency have been and remain a factor in this understanding. Furthermore, their views about their children's language proficiency and language learning also played an important role in their understanding of what would be the best options for their children.

This study occurred in a school district that has nine elementary schools and operates a school choice system that invites parents to select their children's school and language learning program. All families begin the registration process at the Parent Information Center (PIC). As described in the previous section, within each school there are different language learning program options designed to meet the varied needs of English learners. The system operates with the assumption that when parents register their children at the Parent Information Center, the staff are able to explain thoroughly and unerringly the different options offered at each of the schools. Consequently, the school system assumes that parents are able to comprehend details about the required options and procedures in order to make an informed decision about both the school and program for their child. Interpreters and/or bilingual workers are present at PIC to explain the options in the parents' native language whenever possible. Children who have parents who indicate that their family speaks a language other than English in the home are tested for English language abilities, and PIC staff members make school and program recommendations based on the results of the testing.

Because any school's registration system provides extensive information to parents, and parents likewise pass information back; parental comprehension of "terms" having to do with educational concepts and institutional details is key to their general understanding of the American school system and, more specifically, the education of their children. Nine out of the ten parents (90%) interviewed reported working with a staff member from PIC who spoke to them in Spanish and explained their options and recommendations; one interviewee (10%) worked with an English-speaking staff member but this parent reported there were Spanish-speaking people at PIC who at some point spoke with them in Spanish. Even with the availability of interpreters, accounts from five interviewees (50%) included statements signifying

tentativeness about the communication, or, in some instances, worry that in such circumstances there was a risk that language difference was potentially a barrier to their comprehension.

Hence, despite the availability of interpreters and staff, these parents offered comments indicating that language and cultural differences were an element affecting their accurate understanding of their options. For instance, Ramon explained his experience at the PIC and the helpfulness of someone speaking to him in his native language. He stated, "Yes, (they provided a person who spoke to me in Spanish). Because I can understand (English) but sometimes, like, when I go to the doctor I don't understand doctors' terms like, 'Oh, my god, like the lawyers. What (did) he say?' So yes, it was really helpful." Adding, "My wife used to carry - she was in business and she would carry a dictionary just with business terms in Spanish. Because she could speak (English) but not understand terms." Ramon reported that he and his wife speak English and understand English; nevertheless, Ramon acknowledged that both parents sometimes have a hard time understanding technical terms, of which there are many in the field of education. He noted that it was important to him that someone spoke to him in his native language to enable the comprehension needed to make decisions and choices and indicated that in his day-to-day life his English abilities serve him well, yet he anticipated that the technical terms and nuances of education might leave him with less information than he desired when speaking with the staff at the Parent Information Center. His intent to comprehend the nuances of American education suggest that his navigation through the system was methodical and purposeful, as he and his wife attempted to gain agency and support in understanding the American school system. By seeking to hear information in his native language, Ramon sought a resource to gain self-confidence and feel better equipped to understand his child's options fully.

Another participant in the interviews, Nina, initially seemed unsure about the practices and procedures of registering her child; she explained that she was therefore relieved upon realizing that the PIC employee working with her could speak Spanish:

> She (the PIC worker) was very helpful and she, at the beginning we started speaking English, and I did not know. And then we ended up speaking in Spanish. And she was Spanish and I didn't even know that she was. And we finished the conversation in Spanish … but finishing up the conversation in Spanish was even better because I understood everything 100%.

Elena, Maria, Lara, and Norberto all reported that they had an interpreter in Spanish who explained their options for English language learning programs and schools in their native language. Elena elaborated that she did not recall reading any information given to her in Spanish nor did she recall if it was made available to her. However, she did recall that she wanted to understand and was relieved that the woman at PIC spoke Spanish: "While I was waiting, I was not sure. But when I meet with her, I understood well because it was a woman who spoke Spanish." Lara recalled thinking that other Spanish-speakers might possibly struggle to understand: "For the other people (I could see how) it's not easy … other people their Spanish it's very difficult … they (PIC) give a lot of information … I found it (PIC worker speaking in Spanish) helpful." As parents anticipated and initiated contact with the school system, their personal language abilities were evidently present in their minds. Their accounts of the uncertainty they experienced as they engaged in the process and made decisions hint at a fear that their low confidence in their language abilities would deter their encounter with the school system, an encounter they also recognized as having great consequences for their children.

Additionally, parents' comments revealed trepidation that they might choose a school or language program that would not be a good fit for their child. They wondered if their options to change schools or programs would remain open after making the initial decision; several participants mentioned this concern. Parents recalled inquiring as to the possibility of switching programs if the choice they made met with different outcomes than expected based on their initial understanding. Maria remembered being encouraged to choose between two options, "they told me about (this school) and (the Two-Way school) and at that time it seemed to me that (this school) was a better choice. I ask if I can come back if I don't like it." Sofia had a similar concern:

> The first thing I ask, I ask for what kind of school. Because it was my first child and I was nervous … what school I can send my kids? And what program? That's important. And we decided with my husband to send to (this school) … and we decided to just send them over there just to learn English for the whole day. Because we speak Spanish at home.

Nina recalled, "I asked her what would happen if I switched him from (this school) … would he be behind? That's what I was concerned, if he would be behind on the new school that (the instruction) was going to be (in) English."

Parents expressed concern to make the program and school choice for their child that they felt would best meet their children's needs. While grappling with this prerogative to choose, parents seemed put at ease that there was a Spanish-speaking representative at PIC who could explain matters to them in their native language. Five participants (50%) acknowledged during their interview that having an interpreter was helpful to them in making their decision(s). Parents seemed cognizant of the likelihood that in their interactions with the school system, their

language abilities would be a barrier and, hence, feared that they may not fully possess the language tools needed to be fully informed to function as advocates and decision-makers for themselves and for their child. In other words, they possessed an understanding that in the American system their navigation was highly dependent on their own adeptness with the English language, and they revealed hope that were they to embark on a path for their child that they had misunderstood, they could re-inform themselves and make a different choice.

**Understanding role in making choices about their children's education.** Evident in participants' comments was that choosing a school and program was a new experience. In fact, no parents reported having similar experiences of school choice in their native country. Instead, all (100%) participants indicated that there were no choices where they attended school; in their home countries, they attended the school and program that all the children in their neighborhood attended. Parents noted no options for either school or program nor were there any examples where their own parents had a similar responsibility to select a school or program. Lara discussed how in her community in Puerto Rico there was one school and all the children in the neighborhood or immediate area attended that school. Manuel made a similar claim about his own experience in school in Puerto Rico, "over there you go into the school that everyone goes to." For all participants interviewed (100%), the idea of making selections regarding their child's schooling and programming was a novel experience, accompanied by the preliminary task of deciphering the explanations of the available options. State and district policies and procedures presented a new challenge for the participants of this study requiring an understanding of new kinds of information.

As was described earlier in the chapter, in the participants' school district, there are two schools that primarily serve Spanish-speaking families. One school, the Kennedy School, has a

Two-Way Bilingual program and the other school, the school where the participants' children attend, the Washington School, has a Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) program as well as Sheltered English Instruction (SEI), which serves students with many different home languages. The PIC staff make program and school recommendations to parents that, according to the PIC's assessments, would be a good match for the child's language needs. Families who are not familiar with American schools and the American school system enter the system and immediately confront this variety of possibilities and school assignment alternatives.

Ultimately, parents face the responsibility to understand these programs and options as well as to anticipate what these would mean concretely for their child's education. Their route to being a decision-maker, however, was an uncertain and complicated journey; as a result, the processes through which their decisions and choices were informed varied. Parents reported drawing on several different influences to guide their decision-making regarding American schools when originally registering their child.

***Many sources of advice.*** As parents exercised their role in making choices about their children's education they attempted to comprehend the complex rationales of the different programs and the distinct features of the schools. In doing so, they received advice from a range of sources. Parents sought guidance or were offered guidance from individuals, groups of individuals, or others with whom they had pre-existing relationships. They reported obtaining advice from workers at the school district's Parent Information Center (PIC), friends, family members, co-workers, and school personnel. Apart from one participant who referenced doing research on-line, no participants mentioned the guidance they sought or received from organized groups in the community, such as religious groups or advocacy groups to influence their decision-making about their child's schooling.

All parents (100%) interviewed reported that they considered the advice from the PIC staff when making decisions about their child's school and program. Almost all interviewees reported that they had a positive experience with the process of registering their children in the schools and some additionally noted that the procedure was "easy." They maintained that the staff was very thorough in their explanations. For instance, Manuel reported being prepared about understanding his options: "they explained the options to me … (they gave me) something to read about each one." Many participants, when explaining their gratitude with regards to the helpfulness of the PIC staff, noted, like Manuel, that it was a benefit to have staff helping them to understand their choices along the way. Norberto thought the registration process was efficient: "It was easy because they spoke Spanish and they gave me a lot of information to go to … (this) school … yes, I got the paperwork and they went here. And the next week the girls were studying."

Parents also reported receiving guidance from different resources beyond the Parent Information Center. For instance, Nina described receiving advice from her American friends, her Spanish-speaking friends, and her family about school and program choices:

> I did some research. Almost all my friends wanted one school, and some of my Spanish friends wanted one, some of my American friends wanted one … most of my friends put the children in (Kennedy school), but my cousin went to this school (the Washington School).

Hugo pursued his brother-in-law's advice who, in turn, helped him to decide what program to attend:

> I spoke with (my) brother-in-law. So, he wanted one (a school) where (my boys) would learn English gradually. (My older son) is learning English gradually; (My

> younger son) not so much yet I guess. I want them to go nice and slowly into English and not too fast.

Hugo's older son is in the school's SEI program whereas his younger son is in the TBE program. As noted earlier in the chapter, Sofia was concerned as to which school and program to attend. She relied on the input of friends and co-workers:

> … because I asked friends and co-workers about that (which program to choose) because I know that one worker sent his son to the Two-Way program school and they have to come back to (this) school (where the participant's children attend) … that's why (her children attended the Washington school).

Sofia did not want her child to learn Spanish and English at the Two-Way school since her friend had told her that her own daughter had fallen behind in English in that program. Sofia's children ultimately ended up enrolling in the SEI classes in the school where the research took place.

Noteworthy was that no participant indicated that accountability data, reported by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, as to English acquisition test scores or achievement scores, had played a role in their decisions. The mandated publications, both on-line and in paper form, of the historical performances of schools with these tests is intended to inform parent decisions. Parents also did not cite this information as having a bearing on their decisions.

Data established that parents sought advice and guidance from various inputs and they drew on different resources. Figure 2 is a graphic representation of these different resources.

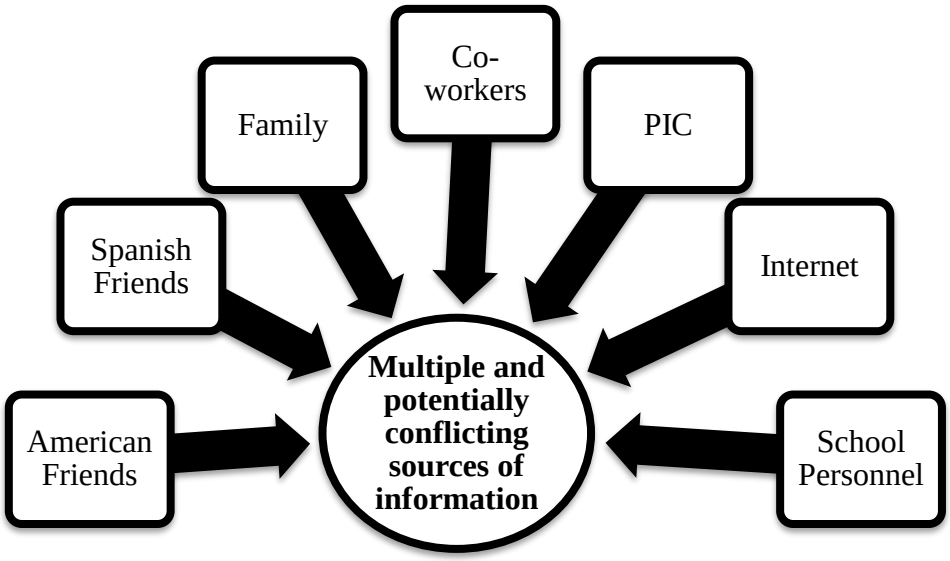


*Figure 2.* Information sources.

***Factors influencing decision-making.*** Part of the registration process for parents of ELs in this school system involved choosing a school and a language learning program that they believed would most appropriately meet their child's academic and language learning needs. As noted earlier, parents appreciated having the option to learn about this process and have it explained to them in their native language. Nevertheless, their accounts suggest that they: (a) sometimes received conflicting guidance; (b) had their own personal preferences and they may not have understood their options fully; and (c) had to make decisions and align themselves with influences they received.

*Conflicting guidance.* Parents reported receiving conflicting guidance from the various sources with whom they engaged. Each parent drew conclusions based on these sources' different experiences and had to consider different bases of value from the different sources and advice they received. Because these various sources had different orientations based on different foundations of knowledge, the advice, at times, was inconsistent. As noted earlier, Nina received advice from American friends, Spanish-speaking friends, and family; this led to a situation where her decision-making was complicated and created a quandary:

> Some of the things were easy. The picking of the school was a little bit more difficult because I had to … (decide amongst conflicting guidance) … so I was like, oh god, what do I do? Go to the one that my cousin went to or go to (the Two-Way school) where most of my friends are going to go? So, I was like, stuck in the middle, like what do I do, where do I go?

Katia heard conflicting guidance from two different family members, her mom and sister-in-law: "I talk my mom and she said here (at the Washington School) and my sister-in-law send her kids to the Two-Way and she said to send there (to the Kennedy School)." These competing recommendations potentially contributed to more—rather than less—misunderstanding, and, based on their accounts, produced unease for parents and added to their uncertainty as they sought the most appropriate program and school match for their child(ren).

Participants took the advice offered by the PIC staff seriously, and, in some instances, there are indications that some parents, after receiving PIC guidance, changed their minds about their selections or veered away from guidance offered by family and friends. As an example, Elena had two grandchildren attending the Two-Way school and her daughter suggested sending her children (grandchildren from a different daughter) there as well. However, after talking with the PIC staff, Elena decided to put her children in the TBE program: "After talking with my daughter, I thought, oh well, have them, have (the children) go to (the Two-Way school), but then they (PIC) explained to (me) about (TBE) and so I accepted that one."

*Parental preferences and possible misunderstanding.* Parents were inclined to sort through their options and embrace their prerogative to make choices for their children. This was accomplished by learning about their options and, thus, about American schooling, from a variety of resources when preregistering and registering their child. In doing so, they expressed

certain preferences for their child's education. In parents' descriptions of their decision-making and the program as well as the school options available to them there were noted differences in their understanding of the nuances and the goals of each. Although they described their interactions with PIC as caring and positive, parents' statements about the different school and program characteristics suggest that the experience itself did not result in a deep understanding of both the program and school options and the implications of choosing one over another. This disconnect may have hindered parents' ability to be fully prepared to make an informed decision.

Most prominent in parents' comments were their preferences for their child to acquire language, either Spanish, English, or both. Many parents expressed that they want their children to be bilingual, but they differed in deciding who—home or school—is responsible to teach which language. In addition, some parents indicated their concern as to whether educating their children in two languages could confuse them depending on the program or school they chose. Overall, parents saw the value in their children being bilingual and most wanted their children to acquire and be proficient in both Spanish and English. The strategies as to how to get their children to achieve this differed and were based on different paths of reasoning. It is important to note that 32 out of 38 parents reported on the questionnaire that they wanted their child to attend a school that developed both English and Spanish when, in fact, all 38 selected a school that offered only subtractive program options, where the development of Spanish is not a goal of any programs at the school. This can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7

*I want my child to attend a school that develops*

| Language | English Only | English and Spanish | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|
| # of Participants | 5 (13%) | 32 (84%) | 1 (2%) |

As described previously, the Washington school offered program or parent choice options for students to enter into a transitional bilingual program, a sheltered English instruction program, or to opt-out of bilingual programming altogether. None of the goals of the programs at the Washington include developing both English and Spanish. A different school in the district, the Kennedy school, offered a Two-Way bilingual program, the only program in the district meeting this criterion (see Table 6). When parents were specifically asked during the interview about the discrepancy, several explained that they developed their children's Spanish in the home and expressed that they viewed the school as having the responsibility to develop their children's English.

The evidence indicates the apparent misunderstanding by some participants of the goals of the different bilingual education programs. Many parents indicated their children were developing Spanish by attending the Washington school where the study was held, when, in reality, that may have been true only for students enrolled in the TBE program; and that was a temporary situation. As already noted, in this particular school, Spanish language development would cease once a child scored a 3 or better on his/her English acquisition (ACCESS) test. None of the parents extolled the benefits of their children learning content in their native language or the benefits of the Two-Way bilingual program as has been noted previously in two separate meta-studies (Collier & Thomas, 2004; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

Another concern parents expressed during the interviews was about the language instruction their children received. For example, when asked how the school can support his child, Norberto quickly moved from a discussion about the school bus to native language instruction:

> Keep getting the services like the transportation and please don't take away the Spanish. The Spanish … if you put them only in English right now they're just not going to learn anything. They should keep learning a little in Spanish so that they'll understand and understand these concepts.

Norberto chose the TBE program as he was fearful that his children would be placed in an English-only (SEI) program too quickly. Manuel also enrolled his daughter in TBE. When pressed to explain his reasoning for choosing the program he did for his daughter, he responded, "I didn't think a lot (about it), I just wanted my daughter (to be) understood in school." Like Norberto, Manuel wanted his daughter to gradually move into an English instructional setting when she was ready. Nina also had concerns about her child's language instruction, yet her reasoning, given her child's past educational experiences, differed from that of Norberto and Manuel:

> We're going to be here (in this community; in the United States). So, I do want him to learn Spanish at the moment (at home). When he was born, I spoke to him in Spanish for the first three years of his life, so he didn't know any English when he started preschool. So, when he started preschool, I put him in English preschool. So, when we came over here (to the Washington School), I was like, I'm going to confuse him (if he enrolls in TBE), first three years in Spanish, and then two years of English, and then now five more years of Spanish, so let's continue with the English, and that's how I decided I wanted him to continue with the English.

Nina's son was enrolled in the SEI program. She further explained her fear of confusion: "I know a lot of my friends went with (the school with the Two-Way program) because they

wanted their children to (learn both Spanish and English), but I didn't. I wanted him to learn the Spanish from us and the English at the school." There was certainly a wide variance of attitudes about who held the responsibility to teach English and Spanish. Parents have the best intentions for their children to acquire language, and the reasoning, thoughts, and explanations as to how to accomplish this varied.

Nina's story illuminates this misunderstanding. Nina's aunt sent her own daughters (Nina's cousins) to the Washington School where the study's participants' children attended. Nina's cousins attended the Washington School at a time when the school housed a Two-Way program and did not have a TBE nor an SEI program. Despite that program moving to the Kennedy school (and much of the staff either moving to that school or changing over time), and despite her aunt's enthusiasm for the Two-Way program, she advised Nina to send her child to the Washington school, which now housed the TBE and SEI Spanish bilingual programs; two completely different programs with different goals. Nina wanted her girls to attend this school because her aunt thought her children might fall behind in English if they attended the Two-Way program at the Kennedy school. However, Nina seemed to misapprehend the outcomes of the different language programs as she expressed that her child would fall behind in English if they attended the Two-Way program:

> She (my cousin) was put here. My aunt, she came, they came a while ago, I don't know if they had all of those options already back when my cousin went to school. But, I asked my aunt and whatever problem you had for my cousin you don't have it now anymore, here (at the Washington school). It was different than what you have … because I remember my cousin used to take more Spanish classes in here back when we first came when he was born. Well, she (my aunt)

> helped me decide. I asked her what would happen if I switched him from (there) … would he be behind? That's what I was concerned (with), if he would be behind (in English at) the new (Two-Way) school (Kennedy) … and she told me that he was going to be a little because he was learning in Spanish (and English) … over there … so he wasn't going to be reading (English) at the same level, the children were going to be reading or writing (in English ahead of him).

Although options are typically viewed as contributing to a desirable experience, parents' comments indicate that facing more than one option led to confusion and anxiety among parents of ELs in the study. In fact, given the historical controversies and politically charged disagreement nationally and within the state with regards to the programs that may best serve English learners, there may be even less clarity for parents. For instance, Sofia noted that her child was enrolled in a Two-Way program and recalled following the advice of PIC and her friends: "they suggest me to send my kids to the school for the two programs, the two programs." Sofia's daughter was actually enrolled in the SEI program, not the Two-Way program. Several parents indicated confusion as they self-reported not recalling hearing about the different program options available to them or believing their child was in a program that was developing both Spanish and English when, in fact, it was not.

*Parents aligning themselves with influences received*. Parents were left to grapple with various influences, some of them disparate, and this added a dimension that seemed to further complicate their decision-making. Being immigrant families new to American schooling, parents were not simply making a stand-alone decision about a school and program, they also, to some extent, faced a decision about with what or with whom, specifically, they wanted to align their thinking. This reasoning influenced parents

making a decision as there is evidence that indicates some wished to continue with home-language traditions, while others appeared to explain that their choices represented a way to express kindredship with friends and/or with family. Additionally, others were focused on the status of being at a school perceived as "good" while still considering the pressure to accelerate their child's English learning. Finally, one family measured their own personal long-term family residency plans when deciding what school and program to choose. The data indicate this range of influences was, at times, overwhelming and instead of providing a clear path, may have instead led to confusion as these different influences in many respects were not in accord.

Most of Nina's friends' children attended the Two-Way school and they urged her to send her daughter there:

> Most of my friends put the children in (the Two-Way school). And my cousin went to this school. So, I was like, oh god, what do I do, go to the one that my cousin went to or go to (the Two-Way school) where most of my friends want me to send (my child)?

Nina took the advice of her aunt *not* to send her child to the Two-Way program, even though her cousins had had success there because she did not want her child to be instructed in Spanish. Instead, Nina enrolled her child in the SEI program so she could receive instruction in English, not in Spanish. Nina feared that her daughter would be behind in English if she attended the Two-Way school but she also considered different variables, such as where her cousins attended school, where her friend's children attended, and where her child would best learn English; these disparate factors led to anxiety as she decided where her child ultimately enrolled.

Sofia experienced some struggles and anxiety enrolling her first child in school as well. She and her husband relied on the advice of friends, her understanding that she was sending her child to a "good school," and her preference for her child to learn English:

> The first thing I ask, I ask for what kind of school … but I ask many people around and see what school I can go. What school I can send my kids? And what programs? And we decided with my husband to send to (this school) because a lot of our friends talk about good things about (this) school. So that's where we send. And we decided to just send them over there just to learn English for the whole day. Because we speak Spanish at home.

The goals of the different language programs and the programs themselves (see Table 6) can become muddled in the minds of parents, especially for parents who are experiencing this choice for the first time. As was established earlier and displayed in Figure 2, parents received advice from various information sources. This led to parents having to not only make a choice as to what they thought was best for their child, but also to choose what or with whom they wished to align themselves and to align their thinking. Given this new experience, of having to make choices for their child's learning experience, parents had to consider what ideas, groups, or individuals they wished to align themselves with to contribute to their own standing as they navigated their way through this process. Table 8 displays the basis of the guidance parents received as well as examples of guidance they received from three of these sources: (a) the Parent Information Center; (b) family members; and (c) American friends, Spanish-speaking friends, and co-workers.

Table 8

*Guidance from Various Sources*

| Source | Basis of Guidance | Examples of Guidance Received |
|---|---|---|
| Parent Information Center | Reviews data from home language survey, language assessment tests and parental preference survey | Students are assessed in English and Spanish (if their home-language is Spanish) to determine language proficiency and the status of ELs. Results of these assessments support teachers and coaches to create and implement educational learning plans for each student and to recommend appropriate bilingual programs. |
| Family | Based on language needs/preferences and/or past experiences | "My brother in law told me to pick a school that teaches English slow" – Hugo<br>"My mom said to have her learn English" – Lara<br>"My aunt came to this school – Nina<br>"My sister-in-law's kids go here" – Katia<br>"My cousin's daughter go to the Two-Ways and she had trouble speaking" – Sofia<br>"(my)sister … said it was important for my daughter to keep her Spanish and then she knew she would gradually go into English" – Lara. |
| American friends, Spanish-speaking friends, co-workers | Based on understanding about the school and/or past experiences | "My close friend had a daughter (here) and he likes it" – Norberto<br>"I know that one worker send his son to the Two-Ways program school and they have to come back to this school … because they got confused" – Sofia |

In essence, parents had to place value on the different advice that different sources gave them. Moreover, the interview data suggests that parents struggled with processing the information as they were grappling with these competing influences. Parents attempted to process and make sense of information using different lenses of understanding and different factors of information. These factors included parents' wishes to continue with home-language traditions, display kindredship with new and old friends, attain status of being at a school

perceived as "good," continue with family's prior school/program choices, accelerate their child's English learning, and consider their own personal long-term family residency plans. As immigrant parents new to American schooling, participants had an added responsibility to view information in a manner that considered these different factors and then to act on both the advice they received while respecting their personal choice and to determine which ones they deemed most important.

**Understanding of school routines and interactions with school personnel.** Another way to gauge parents' understanding of the American school system was to consider how knowledgeable they were of school routines and how parents characterized their interactions with school personnel. This section aims to describe this understanding and is organized according to the following themes: (a) parents' confidence in their understanding of different school and human resources; (b) the importance of point of reference; and (c) what parents want to understand better.

***Parents' confidence in their understanding of school and human resources.*** When asked about school routines and procedures, parents, in a variety of ways, maintained that they understood different aspects of their children's experiences in and with the school. Parents indicated a slightly higher level of confidence in their understanding of aspects of schooling that did not involve or depend on their own adult-to-adult interaction with other school community members. Additionally, the data indicate parents' understanding of American schooling relied on the context of their own experiences with schooling in their native country. The data related to this categorical theme often included statements by participants expressing their perspectives about how American schooling was, in general, "better" in comparison to their own schooling in their native country.

Based on responses on the questionnaire to item 15, a large number of parents reported that they "understand well" or "understand enough" various facets and essential features of an American school, including the school calendar (90%), the school's daily schedule (84%), and the ways in which their children are evaluated (71%). This is represented in Table 9. These responses indicate that parents do believe they have a good understanding of these specific aspects of the school's operation. The two sub-items that scored the highest in the "understand well" response option were the school calendar and the school schedule. The schedule and calendar are topics that represent objective, explicit, and essential information needed for children and families to fulfill basic expectations of the school, such as attending on days the school is open and being appropriately prepared to participate in "specials" class on the days they are scheduled.

The two sub-items receiving the fewest responses in the "understand well" category were "The role of the Parent Teacher Organization" (58%) and "The responsibilities of different adults in the school" (68%). Unlike the calendar and schedule, these two sub-items concern information regarding other adults, both parents and school personnel, and refer to adult interaction contexts that require close attention to interpersonal dynamics. It is easy to see how someone new to American schooling and social life may have difficulty inferring how these adult interaction aspects of the school community operate. Five parents out of 38 (13%) indicated that they wished they had known more about the role of the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), including one parent who maintained that PTO meetings were only held in English and that there was no translator present at the meetings. These data points are displayed in Table 9. Only two parents (20%) mentioned ever attending a PTO meeting in their interviews. Lara explained that she attended one where she learned about the various programs at the school

Table 9

*How well do you understand the following details regarding school?*

| | Understand Well | Understand Enough | Wish I understood more | Don't understand at all | I don't need to understand this | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The role of the Parent Teacher Organization | 17 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 8 |
| The responsibilities of different adults in the school | 17 | 9 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 7 |
| The difference between elementary, middle, and high school | 21 | 6 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| The ways in which your child is evaluated | 22 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 6 |
| The school calendar | 30 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| The school's daily schedule | 29 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 |

and this helped her understand them better. Nina discussed how she learned about MCAS test scores at a PTO meeting.

Based on the data from the questionnaire, participants were less confident about their comprehension of facets of schooling that involve adults or relationships with adults as opposed to things like the schedule and the calendar which are objective and explicit details essential for day-to-day participation. Calendars and schedules are fairly concrete and straightforward regardless of culture whereas interacting with adults in an American school community may present novel challenges with subtle or implied norms.

Moreover, parents' ratings about school experiences indicate that they were influenced by what their children report and/or by what the school reports to them. For instance, participants noted that the instruction and homework in which their child engaged was at the appropriate level of rigor, parents made this determination by looking to what others said about it. In their questionnaire responses, 29 parents (76%) reported that both school assignments and homework assignments were "just right" as far as the level of difficulty for their child (see Table 10). When Hugo was asked in the interview how he knew his son was doing well in school, he stated, "(my son) is doing well because in school he's quiet and well behaved and he's understanding the teacher." He added, "I met with the teachers and the teachers told me that he is doing well." Lara felt similarly with regards to this question and noted her communication with the teacher:

> Because I'm always in the school. I'm always asking the teacher or email the teacher. I'm involved in there for her because I want to know she's doing good. I'm going to give a hundred percent to help her to grow up.

This high rating and the reasons stated for understanding their children are doing well indicates that participants believe the academic experiences their children are engaging in are at the appropriate level and a good fit for their child. These data are displayed in Table 10.

Table 10

*Participant Perception of School/Homework*

| | Too Easy | Just Right | Too Hard | Not Sure | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The lessons/assignments at school are | 1 | 29 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| The assignments my child brings home are | 1 | 29 | 2 | 1 | 5 |

***Parents' schooling serves as reference point in understanding child's schooling***. Much of parents' perceived confidence regarding their understanding of American schooling was expressed through comparisons with their own experiences as students and/or parents in their native countries. Though part of the interview protocol involved an activity that invited them to draw something graphically to depict a comparison, parents additionally seized this opportunity to judge also their children's experiences in an American school based on their understanding of their own or their child's school experiences in their native country.

Parents were asked directly to describe their child's school experience as well as their own school experiences in their native country. Although an evaluative comparison was not elicited, all ten interview participants (100%) included such comparative remarks in their responses during this line of questioning. In various ways, they offered the opinion that the experience their child was receiving in this American school was markedly better than the

experiences they had with their own schooling or as parents of children attending school in their native country.

For some, this feeling that schooling in the United States is "better" originated with parents' recognition that attendance at this school was mandatory whereas it was evidently less so in their native countries. Manuel noted that American schools expect students to attend school and if they do not, the school requires explanations for absences:

> Yes, and also here if she misses a day or more days they call and say, "Where is she?" And they have to bring a note from the doctor if she's really sick. Over there if you don't go to school, okay, whatever.

This idea that mandatory attendance is enforced more seriously in American schools than in participants' native countries was clearly expressed in the majority of interviews – though in different ways to the extent that the concept of mandatory attendance indicated it was a novel concept to many participants. Ramon observed that in the United States, children must go to school, whereas in his community in his native country although children ought to attend school, no one enforced the rule to attend school. Comments representing participants' perceptions of attendance are illustrated in Table 11.

Additionally, participants emphasized the relationship with the teachers. Teachers in their U.S. school were described as being part of the family, being better trained, and caring about their students. According to Lara, the teacher in the United States is practically part of the family. She expressed that teachers were much more approachable and that they cared more about their students and subsequently, her children. Hugo explained that there is much more two-way contact between teacher and parent in the U.S.: "here it's a more familial union between the teachers because there's more contact between the families and the teachers." Similarly,

Katia pointed out that her own communication with the teacher in the United States is nothing like what she had experienced in Puerto Rico, claiming that the teachers in the United States "are more dedicated to teaching the children."

Table 11

*Attendance Perceptions Comparison of Native and American Schooling Experiences*

| Native country school | American school |
|---|---|
| … if your kid doesn't want to show up that's his problem. If the kid doesn't want to go to school the teacher's like, okay if he's not going to learn, fine. -Maria | ... here, if (a student) doesn't show up and (the parent) is a little late calling, they call her. – Elena |
| Over there, they didn't really care that much if the kid didn't go, you just bring an excuse the following day. – Elena | Yes, and also here if she misses a day or more days they call and say, "Where is she?" And they have to bring a note from the doctor if she's really sick. - Manuel |
| Over there if you don't go to school, okay, whatever. – Manuel | |

As parents explained what they noticed about their children's school, their descriptions were frequently expressed as comparisons to their own schooling, which were omnipresent as they tried to make sense of their child's schooling. In essence, the development of their own thoughts and understanding about their children's schooling was heavily influenced by the point of reference they had based on their own schooling in their native country. Parents were quick to evaluate and conclude that the U.S. school experience was preferable and/or more suited to their children's education, a sentiment expressed in many different ways across interviews. For example, Manuel chose to focus on the different supports his children receive:

> Yes, the support and here they really support you so that you can participate and move forward in life and learning. (My children) are both timid. (My daughter) was given support to participate here but when I was in school I wasn't really

> given that kind of support. I think that (my daughter) really has a better chance than I did.

Manuel added that teachers work together and teach children where they are at and work to move them along:

> (At this school) everyone's a little bit more united. I know they teach (my daughter) because she comes home and she works on things and she understands it. If she didn't understand completely the parents help and would tell her, "go back to school and ask if you have doubts in the classroom." So, there are more privileges here for education. (I considered) going back to Puerto Rico but I said, "No, I'm going to stay right here because she'll have a better opportunity to go to high school, college."

Nina stated she was "very lucky to be here, even though my education wasn't bad. The education here is way … better than the one that he (would have) over there." When encouraged to explain her conclusion, she expressed that things in her native country were so bad that she had to attend a private school but articulated that the American public school was even better than that:

> (In my country) the teachers don't get a lot of support. The classrooms are very plain. Since I went to public school with a friend that used to teach me algebra, he taught … I went to private school, he taught at the public school, so I would go at night with him to his class. I enrolled in his class so he could teach me whatever I wasn't … give me a little bit extra support with my other school. The school did not have any tutors or any help though.

She elaborated that in her country receiving extra help was her responsibility, and she had to hire someone to get it, while in the United States she feels as though the teachers and the school take the responsibility to provide the extra help. A comparison of comments juxtaposing the different explanations of American schooling and home country schooling is shown in Table 12.

Table 12

*Comparison of Native Schooling Experiences with American Schooling Experiences*

| Home country school | American school |
|---|---|
| Even in the small school in Puerto Rico there wasn't a lot of contact between the family and the teacher. - Hugo | No, it's different because over here it's the family. And then I put the teacher close to the family. – Lara |
| I say to mama, "Why you bring me to this prison (school)?" - Lara | Yes, I always say that the teacher is part of the family (here). – Lara |
| The teacher go to school for teaching only. Either you pass the class good if no too bad. You don't see the teacher help you the student for pass or good. – Lara | Here it's a more familial union between the teachers because there's more contact between the families and the teachers. – Hugo |
| (I) didn't really get a lot of special support. - Manuel | Whereas (here) they're (teachers) kinder and they treat the children better. – Elena |
| If you don't want to learn they don't press you. – Sofia | The teacher keeps working with the child until you learn it. - Katia |
| So, in Puerto Rico, sometimes the teachers will even yell at the kids … and sometimes they're like excessively strict. - Elena | And here, he's learning, he's getting support, and he's doing his homework independently. – Katia |
| Some (teachers) would explain but others it wasn't that important, like they didn't care that much. Sometimes they would just put a kid to write a whole bunch of stuff onto the board, tell them to copy it. When you're done copying you can leave. And then when the test came it was like, "surprise!" – Manuel | The teacher's job is to help the children at school but as a parent here it's also my job to help at home because the teacher is just one person with twenty children. So, when the child goes home (the parent) also needs to be checking to make sure she does homework. – Lara |
| (In my country) the teachers don't get a lot of support. – Nina | The teachers are trained well and they have a better attitude. – Hugo |

| | |
|---|---|
| Teachers used to spank them with a ruler and at that time the parents couldn't, that was like accepted practice. But I don't want anyone hitting my children. – Maria | They (teachers) have more responsibility … and for me if my child don't do good in the school the teacher start calling me or sending me email … I love that. You know why? Because that's my part. And I have to work with my child. - Lara |
| In Puerto Rico, the teacher teaches something, if you learn it you learn it, if you don't you don't. – Katia | |

**Understanding assessments and how they affect children.** In recent years, hastened in part by an increased federal role in education, schools have been both encouraged and required to communicate more regularly and thoroughly with families about their children's academic and language acquisition progress, both in achievement and growth. As a result, schools send home reports that provide details beyond the information found on the traditional report card. Some of these reports are quite technical, intricately explaining distinctions between growth scores and achievement scores on standardized tests, EL's English attainment scores, the school's report card, and mandated Title I messages explaining parents' options due to the school having a certain percentage of low-income students and the school's performance. Explanations of these various measures are often delivered in reports, notices, or other communications complicated by technical terms that make them difficult for the general public to understand. There is evidence that participants of this study do not find it easy to engage with this information and, as a result, recognize the implications for their children in ways that are merely general and incomplete.

As part of the data collection, this study asked participants questions about standardized tests and how the results are reported. Their responses indicate two clear themes: (a) parents value assessments and receiving information about their child's progress; and (b) parents'

accounts of their experiences with testing information suggest that they have an incomplete understanding of the different assessments and associated reports.

***Parents value assessments.*** Parents showed an eagerness to discuss testing results and what they perceived as the results' importance in their child's schooling. Their responses included statements about the testing being important because it helps their children achieve and grow as students. When asked specifically about the value of these assessments, parents maintained that both the ACCESS tests (annual Massachusetts tests for all English learners to gauge students' attainment of English) as well as the PARCC and MCAS tests were important to track their child's progress and achievement.

> At one point Ramon characterized the testing as having a diagnostic function, explaining: For English learners like my daughter it is good. How (do) they (the school) know if they're learning or if they have the right teacher or they have the right class. Because … people learn different ways. If they (are) thinking they (are) going to teach all the kids at the same way probably my daughter can catch what they say and what they're trying to say … it is really important. (To test 10 kids) just to see three kids they … test and seven fail. So, there's a problem there. That is important (for the teacher) to know that.

Katia expressed that receiving the reports was important to her as a parent, "I can know about the progress of (name of child)." Sofia commented similarly: "I think (testing) is really good. Everything is good for them when they test and that way we can improve, they can improve whatever they have to need help." Lara was asked specifically what the tests tell her, and she responded: "They tell me everything. They tell me if she learn. Is she focus on each test?" Lara

noted that she could use the test as a motivator for her daughter to study in middle school. She explained,

> For me it's great because in my situation how do I going to see my daughter if improvement another year in the school. Like now she graduate from here but she go to the middle school more strong, more bigger than here. And that's why I'm, it's more strong than MCAS for middle school is more strong than here. So, I had to explain to her you have to focus more in the study because that test they give you in a year they are going to repeat and they are going to be more difficult.

Parents expressed confidence when discussing the importance of testing. They articulated that assessments were an essential component for their children's academic growth. Their comments indicate that they valued the results of the test(s), but there were few instances where participants explained these results as formative, where the educators could adjust their practices to address any possible deficits or push further with any strengths.

***Range of understanding.*** On the questionnaire, twenty-two out of thirty-eight participants (71%) responded that they "understood well" or "understood well enough" the way in which their child was evaluated at school (see Table 9). The interview data indicate that parents have different levels of understanding toward the different assessments used throughout the year, specifically, ACCESS tests to gauge language acquisition, and standardized MCAS and PARCC tests that measure English Language Arts, Math, and Science achievement and growth depending on the grade.

Accounts from some participants suggested a tendency to talk generically about testing and not delineate the different names and purposes of the testing programs. Although Nina recalled receiving a booklet about the ACCESS, PARCC, and MCAS tests at PIC when she

registered her child, it is far more likely that she received, as part of the PIC procedure, a booklet on the LAS tests used to inform placement recommendations. In discussing tests, Maria stumbled as she tried to distinguish between the tests. She quickly explained, "Oh, my memory is not very good" and made it clear she no longer wanted to talk about the tests. In describing the ACCESS test, Lara instead referred to an achievement test as she noted how she liked it and it was important:

> Great because they going, you guys, I mean the teacher and everything, they going to know how level they start. All those months they start the school. They sometime they start low when they take the test and maybe go up a little bit.

Some parents quickly offered that they did not understand these tests "that well" while others said that they did. Ramon indicated he was confused about the tests:

> No, (I do not understand them) not one hundred percent … I guess she (his daughter) brought a letter home last month about it. But I don't really understand what it's about. So, I was reading about it. I just (remember it) … wasn't (the) test, (it was) if I give my permission for that test. And I sign it and I sent it back.

In the context of discussing one type of testing Ramon mentioned a procedural requirement pertinent to another type of testing. His assurance that he had granted permission did not coincide with the fact that no such permission was requested; it may have been for special education testing or speech and language testing. These examples reveal that these tests and school communications about them can be puzzling to the participants.

Parents' comments indicate that their knowledge of the testing and assessment processes of the school are incomplete. Several parents noted that what they had understood about the tests was based on what their children reported to them in the home. "My daughter/son told me she

had to take this test" was a common statement spoken during the interviews. Through their comments, parents showed a misunderstanding of not only what these tests measured but also the reason for their administration. Consequently, when given an opportunity to elaborate, some parents realized their confusion and seemed content dropping the subject and moving on with the interview. Parents were, however, unable to articulate the idiosyncrasies and nuances of the differences between formative assessments that are given throughout the year and used to guide a teacher's instruction as opposed to summative assessments that tend to be used more at the school and district-level to leverage resources, drive professional development, and inform curriculum decisions.

Some parents expressed guardedness discussing testing procedures and the incompleteness of their understanding while others outwardly embraced the opportunity. One participant, Nina, offered a memory that expressed cynicism toward standardized testing from a particular experience she had as a child in her school in her native country. She went so far as to explain her understanding of standardized testing by delineating how her school responded to the demands of these tests by cheating by having her take the tests for other students:

> Back when I was in high school, they started something similar to the SATs … (they were) like national tests, that the government was giving to all of the schools. It was a way of telling if the school was doing (well), depending on what the results were of the children, and my school was freaking [*sic*] out. They were freaking [*sic*] out. They were, I took the test for many, many, children in my last year. I went and took the test so the school could do (well). That's how worried that school was (that the school asked me to do that). And I'm like after … that's

how it was. At the moment, I was like oh sure, I felt honored to take the test for so many people. Now, I'm like, "oh god."

Additionally, though some parents mentioned research on the Internet when they discussed researching programs and schools, no one specifically referred to the school's online "report card," which is mandated to be posted by law and aims to promote accountability for schools by including information for parents about student performance and program effectiveness, nor did they refer specifically to any information regarding ACCESS, PARCC, or MCAS scores of the school. These measures appear to have played no role in participants' decision-making or the formulation of their attitudes toward the school. This is important to note, for, after all, parents describe these tests as important (below in question 3) when accessing how their own child performs in the school.

The quantity and the variety of tests children take at school can be easily confusing, and parents' misunderstandings of these standardized assessments are not shocking. Schools each use the data these assessments provide in different ways in an attempt to extrapolate meaning from them; as a result, it is not surprising that parents would hold different levels of understanding of such tests. All parents interviewed and who completed the questionnaire for this research indicated that these assessments were important, yet none articulated concrete details about how these assessment efforts had relevance or importance for their particular children. There was an underlying assumption as to the importance of the tests, but the evidence indicates that parents struggled to draw specific conclusions as to why they claimed it was important.

***What parents want to understand better.*** It was very difficult to determine what parents participating in the study wanted to understand better about American schooling. Cautions were

exercised when questioning participants. Care was taken in both the questionnaire and in the interviews to ask and word questions in a manner that would not indicate the interviewer in any way presumed the participants had any deficits in their thinking or understanding. Moreover, referring back to the questionnaire represented in Table 9, parents were asked to rate their understanding of several different facts of schooling. Only five of the 38 parents indicated that they wished they had known more about the role of the Parent Teacher Organization and the differences between elementary, middle, and high school. However, in the ten interviews that succeeded the questionnaire, none of the participants referenced these inclinations.

In addition, one of the interview questions alluded to an understanding of the American school system within the context of the registration system at PIC. The question asked if PIC staff said anything or asked, "anything you did not expect or understand?" All participants responded that they did not say or ask anything, except for Norberto who recalled not understanding everything until they provided him with a staff member who spoke to him in Spanish. A follow-up question was also asked, "Were there things you thought you would talk about but didn't?" Again, the participants all responded negatively. Participants did not indicate there were any particular elements of their child's schooling experience or their experiences as parents that they wanted to understand better.

Earlier in the chapter it was noted that parents sought information from various resources when presented with the task of enrolling their child in a particular program and a particular school. This is evidence that they wanted to know about the different programs and schools. Parents took this prerogative seriously and made decisions based on information they received from a myriad of resources. Beyond learning more about the program and school, the research

indicates that participants did not reveal any other particular facets of American schooling they wanted to understand better.

**Findings.** The first research question sought to gauge the participants' understanding about American schools and those aspects that they wished to understand better. Specifically, Research Question 1 reads, *How knowledgeable are immigrant Spanish-speaking parents about the American school system and American schooling? What do they not understand, and what do they wish to understand better?* This section reviewed facets of the school experience from parents' perspectives and describes the many ways in which parents attempt to make sense of them. The findings are illustrated in Figure 3.

Finding #1

Participants in this study struggle to understand language used by educators and nuances of the American educational system, which pose an obstacle to understanding American schooling.

Finding #2

Participants in this study experience conflicting advice about school and program choices for their children.

Finding #3

Participants in this study maintain that they understand the American School System; however, many of their explanations are based on a comparison with their understanding of their own school experiences in their native countries.

Finding #4

Participants in this study maintain that testing is valuable to the school and to them as parents; however, their defense does not specify how these assessment efforts have relevance or importance for their particular children.

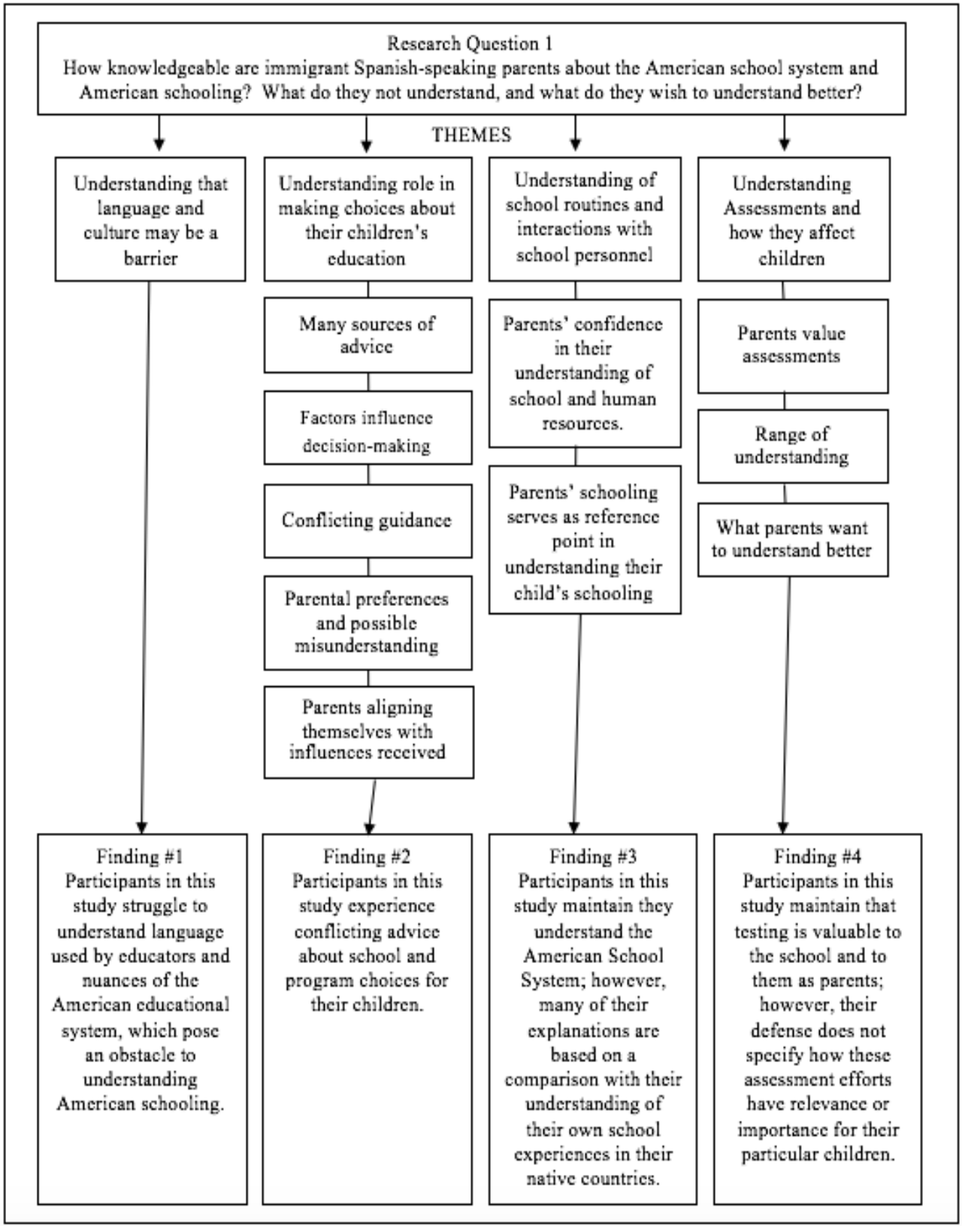


*Figure 3.* Themes and findings relevant to Research Question 1

**Data Relevant to Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 focused on what parents of ELs wanted for their children from the school and how they supported their child's education at home. Research Question 2 specifically asked: *"What do Spanish-speaking parents of children enrolled in a program serving English learners in a U.S. elementary school want for their children from the school? What do they regard are the most important ways to support their child's education?"* Examples of what parents wished for their children during their schooling, beyond their schooling, and ways they support their child's education are explored in this section.

Although indirect probes were needed to inquire about Research Question 1, a more direct approach was possible for Research Question 2. There were several questions that addressed parents' understanding of the different possible experiences in school as well as questions related to post-schooling preferences. Data were analyzed and cross-cutting themes emerged. These themes are described below. Findings are presented at the end of the section.

**What parents want for their children from the school.** Responses from the questionnaire and the interviews demonstrated that parents wanted a range of supports from the school, including how they wished their children's Spanish and English were developed, what they receive socially and academically from their school experience(s), and what opportunities the school could provide for their children. Two themes emerged: the first was how parents wished for their children's school experiences to reduce both their own and their child's confusion and/or anxiety; the second was the wish for their children's schooling to provide passage or keys to entry to various future opportunities.

***Reduction of confusion and/or anxiety.*** As was prominent with regards to Research Question 1, many parents indicated that language development, both in Spanish and English, was

an area of concern, yet their ideas and beliefs about which language to develop, when it should be developed, and why it should be developed varied greatly. Language development, however, regardless of whether parents spoke of Spanish language development or English language development, was a theme highlighted to reduce parents' fears about their children's acculturation to school, accessing the curriculum, and meeting with academic success. Also, parents sought language development to reduce their children's possible or potential confusion in school. All parents interviewed commented on the importance of language development, and several questionnaire participants did so as well, but the reasoning for such attitudes toward language development varied. This theme is sub-categorized into "avoiding confusion" and "fitting in" and are presented next.

*Avoiding confusion.* Some parents identified wanting the school to develop their child's English language proficiency, and they emphasized this as an effort to avoid confusing their child with two simultaneous languages in school. Sofia purposely avoided sending her child to the Two-Way school believing that trying to learn both English and Spanish concurrently in school would be onerous for her child. She chose the Washington School because she wanted her child to learn English and to enroll in a program (SEI) that taught the students in English but where the school had some bilingual staff who could support her daughter in Spanish if needed. Nina stated similar reasoning:

> I want my children to have both English and Spanish. But I feel I can cover it at home in Spanish and then … in school learn in English. I don't want his schooling interrupted; I don't want him to be confused. So, he's still learning Spanish in my home. Just I wanted him academically, whatever he was going to learn, to learn it in English.

Nina elaborated how her moving from a different community affected her choice:

> We're going to be here (in the United States). When he was born, I spoke to him in Spanish for the first three years of his life, so he didn't know any English when he started preschool. So, when he started preschool, I put him in English preschool (in Florida). So, when we came over here, I was like, I'm going to confuse him, first three years in Spanish, and then two years of English, and then now five more years of Spanish, so let's continue with the English, and that's how I decided I wanted him to continue with the English.

Similarly, Lara saw the importance of her daughter learning English in school because she valued the importance of her daughter being able to speak the dominant language in the United States and expressed that she could manage teaching her child Spanish at home:

> My daughter needs to learn English in school. Why? Because she never going to forget the parent language. Always she going to start at home, my mother, people that don't (speak English), like my husband's mother, they don't speak English so for me keep her learning English … always in English. Start talking Spanish at home, reading books, writing.

Conversely, some parents believed in the importance of the school developing their child's Spanish as a way to avoid confusing them. These parents appeared apprehensive about having their children learning in an English-only setting and strongly expressed that the school needed to teach their children in their native language (Spanish), pending a readiness to learn in English. The underlying concern was that without their native language, their child would not be able to access the curriculum and would, therefore, fall behind his or her peers with academic

content. In the interviews, Norberto stated decisively, "Please do not take away the Spanish. If you put (my children) in an English-only (setting) they are just not going to learn anything."

Regardless of whether parents wanted the school to focus on the development of English or Spanish, their explanation of their choices indicated that they were making efforts to reduce their own fears regarding their child's acculturation to the United States. The evidence indicated that these efforts to avoid confusion for their children were heavily dependent on their children's language development.

*"Fitting in."* Some parents expressed their wishes for their child to learn English at school and to be a part of a school where they "fit in" and did not "stand out" because of the Spanish that is spoken in their homes. Parents viewed learning English as a necessary condition for their children to acculturate, socialize with peers, and feel confident. One questionnaire participant described having just moved to this country and "although (I) had a base in English … (I want my children) to completely lose their fear of speaking and to learn to speak the language properly … (so they may) socialize well with all students and people in this country." This parent hoped that a higher level of English proficiency would help her daughters gain the confidence they would need in this country. The parent was concerned about her daughters "fitting in" with peers and within the culture of the United States. Another participant stated she was pleased "(my daughter) can speak English and she is more and more involved with peers and family." She specified wanting her "daughter to do her best and to not be afraid to do what she likes." Similarly, this participant desired her daughter to possess a level of fearlessness as a result of being comfortable with the English language and establishing peer groups.

Furthermore, some parents saw the value of learning English because it is the dominant language in the United States; gaining a higher level of English-language proficiency would

allow their children to possess fluency in what they believed to be the dominant language. Despite Ramon noting that he personally benefits from speaking two languages, he wanted his two children to speak English and to learn English in school because of its prevalence in the United States and the world. His children learning English well was important to him, and it would reduce his anxiety that his children would fit it. He stated:

> Well right now I live, right now this moment I speak two languages. I can do more than just by speaking one. (My children were) born here ... they (are) from North Carolina and Tennessee. So, they (are) from here … they need to know why it's important to speak the language for English. And I would like to speak, I one day speak this language well because it's the number one (language) in the world. I mean English, if you go anywhere in the world they speak English.

***Providing passage or keys to entry to various, future opportunities.*** Parents viewed their children's schooling as a vehicle to provide passage to future opportunities. In the following sections, parents indicated the importance of their children doing well in school, both socially with their peers (as described in the previous section) and academically. Parents believed that their children meeting with academic success would provide keys to later opportunities in both schooling as well as in occupational paths they might choose. Moreover, parents saw the value in their children being bilingual and possessing fluency in both Spanish and English.

*Academics, language acquisition, and social/emotional learning.* Parents were not specific with regards to preferring any particular academic course but instead spoke about the importance of schooling in a general sense. Elena wanted the school to "keep the kids in school" and to promote college and university. She cited how she and her daughter were appreciative of

some work that the elementary school had done recently with the fifth graders when they spent the day at the local college and how important it was for her daughter to do well so she could attend college. Maria summed up her view of education succinctly: "just get a good education because it is very important and everything depends on it." She believed education was a critical component to providing her child opportunities and choices in her future school and work paths.

When considering what was important for their child in their school experience, parents indicated that learning academic subjects, learning English, and developing social and emotional skills taught in school all had value. Table 13 displays responses to questionnaire item #15 and shows that parents "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that almost all facets of school life listed were of importance. Both social and emotional variables as well as academic issues were listed as equally important. Of all categories, "Learning English" and "Reads and writes well in Spanish" had the most participants who did not respond. This was double that of any of the other categories. No categories received any "disagree" or "strongly disagree" responses. Participants either responded that they "agreed" or "strongly agreed" between 79% - 92% for each of the facets of school life.

Table 13

*In School, it is important that my child – Item #15*

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Learns academic subjects | 31 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Learns to be a good citizen | 32 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Learns to get along with others | 31 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Always gives his/her best | 32 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Reads and writes well in English | 31 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Reads and writes well in Spanish | 27 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| Gets good grades | 32 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Learns English | 28 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| Learns English and Spanish | 32 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |

The data indicate that parents want to see that their children do well in each category presented. Additionally, they want their children to acquire and understand English in school in a way that will nonetheless allow them to be supported with their native language, Spanish. As noted in the previous section, parents realize that learning English is a key variable to their child's success both academically and socially, by fitting in with their English-speaking peers. They are also aware that the ways in which their children acquire English and receive academic supports from the school in their native language as well as the manner in which their children's English is cultivated necessitate the educators knowing their child's needs as an individual.

*Bilingualism.* Several parents commented about the importance of bilingualism and the benefits of being dual-language speakers as they examined the ways the school could meet their child's language needs for their future. Manuel stated that possessing both languages was important for learning: "I think it's better to have both Spanish and English because you can learn more things, yes, with two languages than in just one language." Maria wanted her children to

learn English because it is the dominant language in the United States and she wanted her children to learn and keep Spanish for utilitarian, family reasons:

> I want them to know English because here we live in a country where they speak English and also Spanish because as a mother sometimes they could help be my interpreter … I can't have them just speaking English because I don't speak it.

Sofia saw the benefit of learning both languages for her children's future opportunities:

> Well I think that they use both because I think if you know more languages you can get more better jobs. That's what I think. That's what is important to my kids learn both languages. Even if they learn a little more that's perfect but for now English. But I think they speak most English. Yes, sometime(s) I have to talk to them and then say, "Hey we need to speak Spanish over here. Because I don't want them to just forget it.

Whether parents preferred English development, Spanish development, or both, their preference was indicative of their desire for their child(ren) to reduce confusion and parents' fears that their child(ren) "fit in" and acculturate to American schools.

**Wishes for their children beyond public school.** When thinking to the future, and what opportunities public schooling would afford their children, many participants wished for their children to attend college and/or university and to obtain a professional job such as a writer or a teacher. A few parents were adamant about not choosing any particular path for their children and pointed out that it was their child's choice; others were less specific, using terms like "onward and upward" (Manuel). Manuel further explained, "she's going to decide which career she wants because if you just decide for her she's not going to focus on that. She is the one that has to decide." Other parents simply wanted their child to do well and be a good person.

Some parents hoped for specific professions. Maria was specific with her wishes as she hoped for her child to become a "lawyer or a good doctor." While Nina began by stating she wanted her son to have a "good job," when pressed, she elaborated, "a doctor or a banker, to work for a big company, have a big … it doesn't need to be a big company but a good company but he has a good job. And he has a good life. And even that, I didn't have, that's what I want him to have." Elena's son had shared with her that he wants to be a lawyer, police officer, or a singer; Elena explained that she told him he could be a singer but that he needed another profession to go along with it. Manuel wanted his daughter to be a teacher. Several parents wanted their children to have better or more opportunities than what they presently have. For instance, Lara is a hair stylist and she mentioned how her daughter has expressed that she wants to be a hair stylist as well. Lara noted that she had to study to be a hair stylist but as a mom, she supports her daughter with her studies with the hope that her daughter will have more varied employment options when she is older.

While some parents focused more on academia, others concentrated on the process of schooling. Norberto wanted his son to graduate with honors. Kendy aspired for her child to graduate. Angela hoped that her daughter would do well in school and go to college. One participant wrote, "I look forward (for) my son to keep growing and learning and being able to learn and enjoy school every step of the way ... and to learn education; that is very important for his future." In her questionnaire, Anagarcia wrote that she wanted her daughter to be a good person.

In the interviews, without explicitly stating it, parents desired for their children to have greater opportunities than they felt they presently had as adults. This can be seen in parents' discussions about both their longing for their children to learn English and "fit in," as well as

with their desire for their children to get a professional job and/or to continue their education into college. Implicit in their aspiration for their children to learn English is the idea of parents recognizing that language, for them, may have been an obstacle when trying to understand the differences in schools and programs outlined in the previous discussion of Research Question 1. One can assume that this language barrier is a hindrance in other facets of life that they want their children to avoid. Moreover, there was an underlying understanding that parents wanted a different "employment" future for their children from the one they had.

**Findings.** The second research question focused on what parents of ELs wanted for their children from the school and how they supported their child's education at home. Specifically, Research Question 2 asked: *"What do Spanish-speaking parents of children enrolled in a program serving English learners in a U.S. elementary school want for their children from the school? What do they regard are the most important ways to support their child's education?"* This section reviewed what parents wished for their children during their schooling as well as beyond their schooling and ways they support their child's education. The findings are illustrated in Figure 4.

Finding #5

Participants in this study demonstrate concern over their children's English language acquisition and how English proficiency functions as a factor in acculturation to the United States.

Finding #6

Participants in this study indicate a preference for their children to remain bilingual but vary in how they expect to foster Spanish language development.

Finding #7

Participants in this study express the desire for their children to demonstrate success in school and life with the hope that they will have a greater number of options and opportunities in their future.

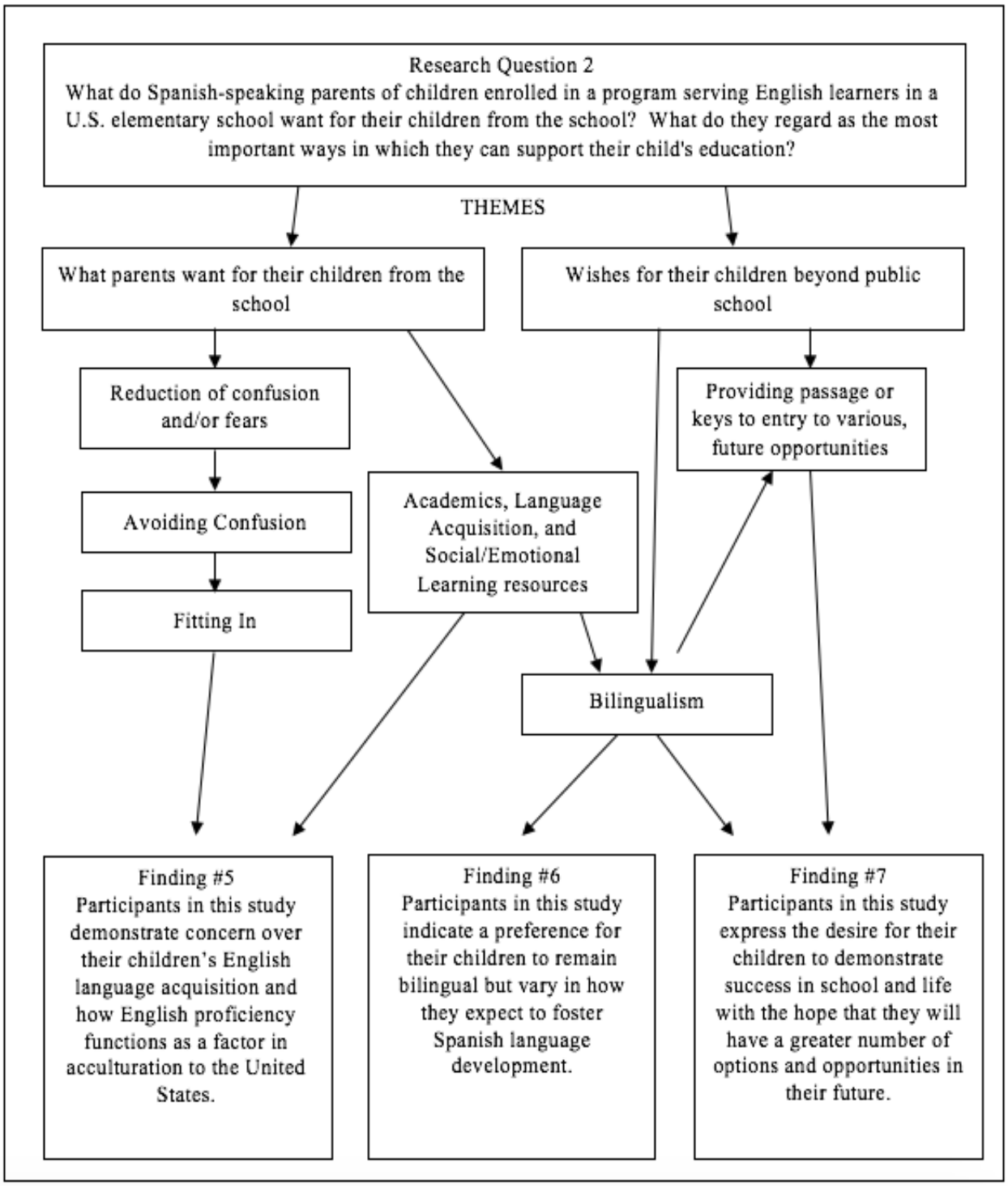


*Figure 4.* Themes and findings relevant to Research Question 2.

**Data Relevant to Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 (RQ3) focused on parents' perceptions of the experiences their children have in the school. The data relevant to RQ3 led to an exploration to determine what those perceptions were in order to gauge from parents what the school needed to know to ensure that their children had positive experiences. Research Question 3 specifically asked, *"What are parents' perceptions about the experiences their children have at school and what do they want the school to know about their children to enable them to have good experiences at school?"*

As the following analysis shows, parental perceptions about the school were heavily influenced by feelings they experienced while interacting with school personnel. Similarly, parents' expressions of what they wanted were also strongly influenced by their sentiments toward different facets of the school experience. An analysis of the data around these two ideas showed a significant overlap between them. In essence, when parents reported their perceptions about the school, they often indicated what they valued and what they wanted the school to know about their children. Through parents' accounts, an explanation of the formulation of these feelings, and, subsequently, their perceptions of the school and what they wanted the school to know about their child were constructed. Through an analysis of the data, cross-cutting themes emerged. Data relevant to the third research question are reported and analyzed below according to two themes: (a) connections with the school; and (b) understanding that there are differences from perceived norms. Findings are presented at the end of the section.

**Crucial connections to people.** Based on participants' responses, it is evident that their perceptions of their children's experiences at school have much to do with how well they felt they and their children were connected to the school. On both the questionnaire and during the interviews, parents noted their perceptions about the school and used their own experiences of

how they had been treated when interacting with school personnel as evidence to support their perception(s). Parents clearly value feelings of connectedness with the school and with school personnel. Through a discussion of their treatment and, subsequently, their perception of the school and their child's experiences, two sub-themes emerged. The first is that parents value experiencing a warm and welcoming environment at the school. These feelings and perceptions begin upon families' first introductions to the school, and they are influenced by how parents are greeted, treated, and made to feel respected. The second sub-theme is that parents value that the educators working with their children are deeply invested in their well-being and made efforts to engage and get to know the children on a personal level.

***Warm and welcoming environment.*** The evidence indicates that parents feel connected to the school when they believe school personnel make efforts to be warm and welcoming. Eight out of ten (80%) participants interviewed reported in various ways that beginning from when they first arrived at the school they were greeted warmly and treated respectfully by staff who were "nice" and "kind." This also surfaced and appeared in various ways frequently in the questionnaire data. It was evident in the data that the parents' accounts of a welcoming environment and the intentional effort by people at the school to form personal relationships had a strong impact on the formulation of parents' perceptions of the school and their children's experiences.

One participant noted that the staff and teachers "are always friendly." She explained, "(I) like that the teachers are very nice and helpful, especially to the Hispanic community … this school is wonderful." Nina noted that everyone knows her name and her son's name, and this makes her feel welcome. She added, "They know the little guy (her preschool aged son) that doesn't even go to the school, (people say) 'Hi, good morning, (child's name).' They know him

too." Nina added that she is impressed that the teachers allow her to walk her son to class. Anagarcia and Sofia both described how they always feel welcome at the school and the people were all "very nice."

Katia noted that the school was a "good school." When asked to explain, she stated: "For the treatment, the education, and the respect that the school gives you. When you get to the school, they say 'how are you, good morning,' and that shows that they respect me." One participant claimed that the teachers at the school behave in a way that is "very professional", and as a result, she expressed that her child was receiving a "very good education." Another participant maintained that the school is providing positive experiences for her and her children because they "show love, respect, and discipline." Sofia added that her fondness with her daughter's teacher was because the teacher treated her daughter with reverence: "I really like the teacher; she treats(s) them (the students) with respect and affection." Alicebeth mentioned her daughter's treatment specifically when describing why her daughter loved school: "my daughter love everything about school and the teacher and especially the treatment they give. My daughter loves school because she participates a lot and she has fun … my daughter is welcome always here."

Parents discussed the relationships with staff, and some revealed they considered the teacher as part of their family. Nina described having a close relationship with her son's teacher; for instance, she wrote a note with her son to the teacher when she learned the teacher was having a baby. Hugo juxtaposed teachers in the United States and teachers from his home country: "here it's a more familial union between the teachers because there's more contact between the families and the teachers." Lara also believed the teacher in the United States is part of the family. She described teachers as approachable, noting that they cared more about their

students and, hence, her children than teachers in her native country. Parents established that experiencing close interpersonal relationships with the school staff and experiencing warm, welcoming, and respectful treatment for both themselves and their children were contributing factors to feeling positive toward the school and the school staff. Parents' perceptions were influenced by how well they felt the staff personally connected both to them and their children.

***Personal interest in the children and families.*** Additionally, connections were further established and perceptions were influenced by the level of interest school personnel had in the children. Cristian wrote that he "really likes this school and the teachers because they are all quite interested in the teachings of my son." Similarly, Katia mentioned the level of interest the staff had in her child as a reason she liked the school, comparing it to very different experiences she had in Puerto Rico:

> Over there, (name of child) didn't do well in school and he had to repeat a grade, and he failed and had to repeat. And here, he's learning, he's getting support, and he's doing his homework independently … in Puerto Rico, the teacher teaches something, if you learn it you learn it, if you don't you don't. But here, the teacher keeps working with the child until you learn it.

Katia was also pleased with teachers' persistence. She believed teachers in the United States "are more dedicated to teaching the children." A questionnaire participant noted, "all (staff) are attentive."

On the questionnaire, parents were asked the best way to complete statements about how well the school understands their child and how well the school understands what they want for their child. The results from the first sub-item of this question indicate the importance parents put on people at the school understanding their child. As can be seen in Table 14, overall parents

reported that school personnel understood their child "Very Well" or "Well Enough" (95%). The staff's investment in understanding and knowing the children and families they serve can also be

Table 14

*People at School Understand My Child - Item #29*

| Very Well | Well Enough | Not Well | Not Sure | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 26 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| 95% | | 0% | | 5% |

seen in the responses to the second sub-item of question 29. From the questionnaire, as Table 15 indicates, thirty out of thirty-eight (84%) parents responded with a "Very Well" or "Well Enough" to the question that asked if "People at school understand what I want for my child." The eight respondents who did not select either of these responses failed to provide an answer to the inquiry. These responses indicate a common belief among parents that school personnel also possessed an understanding of parents' desires for their children from the school. The data show that having a staff that was responsive, helpful, and dedicated to understanding the students were critical elements that led to positive feelings about the school and the school experience for parents.

Table 15

*People at School Understand What I Want for My Child – Item #29*

| Very Well | Well Enough | Not Well | Not Sure | No Response |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 24 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| 84% | | 0% | | 21% |

Finally, connections with the staff and the staff taking personal interest in parents and in their children, were also discussed in terms of seeking and receiving help and support. A review of Table 9 and its comparison to the different indicators shows that "The responsibilities of

different adults in the school" was an exemplar that scored lower than the other exemplars for understanding by the participants. For those participants who indicated on this exemplar that they "understood well" … "The responsibilities of different adults in the school," a profound appreciation of "help" emerged from their comments; this help and the responsiveness of the staff was valued by participants. Several commented that they were helped by individuals in the school at different times when they needed it. One participant noted that the staff and teachers "are always friendly and helpful." She explained, "(I) like that the teachers are very nice and helpful, especially to the Hispanic community … this school is wonderful." Another participant identified the staff as "responsive" and "helpful", noting "(they) are always present to help." Lastly, one participant explained, "they translate for you, my son is happy being here."

The evidence indicates that that the staff's personal investment in children and families strongly influenced parents' outlooks toward the school. Repeatedly, parents noted that they liked that the staff were persistent, helpful, that they took the time to know both the children they serve as well as learn and understand parental wishes for their children. Participants based their perceptions of the school and the experiences their children were having at the school on how these connections allowed them to be active participants in the school community and be part of the school. In the next section, the recognition of the importance of fitting in is further explored as parents indicate an awareness that they and their children have particular needs given that they are immigrants and English learners.

**Recognizing they are different.** Parents understood that their status in the school community as immigrants, language learners, and newcomers would likely result in their having particular needs that may have been different from what they may have perceived as the "normal" needs children and families from the majority culture possess. Though parents noted

an appreciation of school personnel showing warmth, acceptance, kindness, and help as noted in the previous section, there were also statements that reveal an awareness that participants' experiences were not perfectly aligned with the routines and experiences they perceived were typical or customary for an American school. Participants displayed an awareness that the school and the school's systems were not designed to meet their particular needs. Their comments established an awareness that they viewed that their needs and particular situations were additional burdens to the school and required "extra" efforts by the school to meet them. Parents expressed the desire for the school to understand that they were new to the school community, that their children were English learners, and that they were English learners. Parents hoped the school could meet their particular needs and continue providing support to them and their children so that they could continue to improve their standing in the school community. These differences and English learner's particular needs are described below.

***Crucial connections to aspects of programs.*** In their responses, there were parents who made a point of underscoring aspects of the school program that had particular importance for their children. They valued that high expectations were put on their children and indicated that success in academics and with language acquisition would lead to their children's acculturation. Ramon observed that his daughter liked to write, and it was important for the school to support and encourage his daughter's academic interests. He stated that though this might be a hobby now, his daughter may want to continue and "be a teacher, or doctor or something … the school helps a lot (with encouraging this)." Anagarcia and another participant both indicated that the school's specials programs (art, music, and physical education) played a major role in why their children liked school and why they were doing well with their peers. Sofia noted that the school promoted reading, how important reading was, and how she could see the results at home. Sofia

added that her daughter liked school because the teachers had "high expectations" for her. She thought the teachers worked very hard because her daughter was being assessed every week in the classroom, and the teachers expected her to retain what she learned. Ramon explained that when he was growing up his mother was a teacher, and, that background helped him recognize that his children were having good experiences with their teachers and with the school. This was due to what his children described and their academic progress:

> I'm a son of thirty plus year teacher. So, my mother was a teacher for thirty plus years. So, I know … and I know the feeling … they tell me good things … if they say it's okay with that then I'm okay. So, they are doing well because (name of child), now she's understanding. She got to get on learn. She got to study. Now it's getting easier.

These statements from parents are indicative of their sincere attempt to make known the aspects of the school experience that mattered most for their children.

Moreover, parents wanted the school to know that their language background meant that they and their children needed some special considerations. These needs were ranged from when parents noted that there were instances when they or their children may require translation services to the processes for development of language acquisition that the school employs for their children. Many parents commented that they appreciated that there were so many people on staff who could speak to them in their native language, Spanish; this helped them to access the school and school personnel. Having the opportunity to communicate through translation was valued by parents. Eliana liked the school because her daughters liked it, and she could speak Spanish with the staff: "My daughters love the school (we) recommend it to everyone … and tell them that they can speak Spanish and (and the staff can) help them." Norberto, Elena,

Nina, Ramon, Maria, Manuel, Sofia, and Lara each mentioned that they were grateful that the Parent Information Center provided translation services to them when they were registering their child.

As mentioned in a previous section, Norberto expressed strong feelings about his daughters being in the TBE program. He wanted his daughters to learn their content in Spanish and learn English gradually:

> Please don't take away the Spanish … if you put them only in English right now they're just not going to learn anything. They should keep learning a little in Spanish so that they'll understand.

***School/Staff flexibility and willingness to engage families.*** Parents recognized that their life schedules may require the staff and/or the school and school schedule to be flexible. In this school system, there are several half-days for students where teachers hold parent conferences in the afternoon. Many parents preferred to meet at the school during the evening or before the start of school for different reasons and several noted an appreciation for the staff's flexibility. Norberto related that a preference for "after work or the evening but if they want to meet with him he'll take a day off." Nina also preferred evenings due to her work schedule, "At night, usually I'm a stay at home mom. I have a part-time (job) afterschool." Furthermore, Sofia noted her work schedule and commented that she wanted a full meeting that was not rushed:

> Well I work every morning. So, afternoons is better for me because that is the time that I have enough time … because over here in this country all the time we have hurry up … and then every time we don't have time to finish.

Other parents mentioned issues beyond their work schedules and included other realities like transportation obstacles. Many parents live far from the school. Elena preferred meeting

teachers in the morning because she had a better chance of getting a ride with someone, "in the morning is better. I don't have transportation so I need other people to bring me to the school. It's far to go to school so it's hard for me to get there and home." One participant appreciated that the school offered opportunities for her to visit and watch her child perform during nights, "I like all the Open House (nights) for parents (and) the concerts for the children are great." Grateful that her daughter could explore extra-curricular activities, she liked that this went beyond typical classrooms experiences and that she was invited to attend these events in the evening.

Angela had high praise for her daughter's teachers due to their willingness to communicate with her in ways that met her needs, "(my) experience is excellent. They call me back, text me, meet with me any time before or after school." Maria shared similar beliefs, expressing gratitude for her daughter's teacher's scheduling flexibility and the teacher keeping in touch with her through a texting application. Ultimately, parents were grateful that teachers and the school were willing to be flexible to meet their needs.

Fostering positive academic experiences, developing students' English, offering programming that allowed the children to meet with success with peers, and being flexible to meet the particular demands of parents of ELs and their situations and schedules are all examples where the school and school personnel worked to meet particular needs of families of English learners. Parents expressed gratitude and placed value on this. Having opportunities to connect with the school by fostering opportunities to create interpersonal relationships and to get to know the needs of the children all contributed to parents' and families' acculturation and reduced their perceptions of feeling different.

**Findings.** The third research question focused on parents' perceptions of the experiences their children have in the school. Specifically, Research Question 3 asked: *"What are parents' perceptions about the experiences their children have at school and what do they want the school to know about their children to enable them to have good experiences at school?"* This section reviewed parents' perceptions about their children's experiences and gauged what parents wanted the school to know in order to facilitate positive experiences for their children. The findings are illustrated in Figure 5.

Finding #8

Participants in this study indicate that their feelings of connectedness are largely influenced by how well they feel they and their children are treated, how well they perceive their child is understood, and how invested the staff is in getting to know the child and what parents want from the school.

Finding #9

Participants in this study understand that their status in the school community as immigrants, language learners, and newcomers to the school signals to others that they are different and likely to require additional efforts on the part of the school. They want the school to understand their perspective and join with them so that their connection with the school can continue to grow.

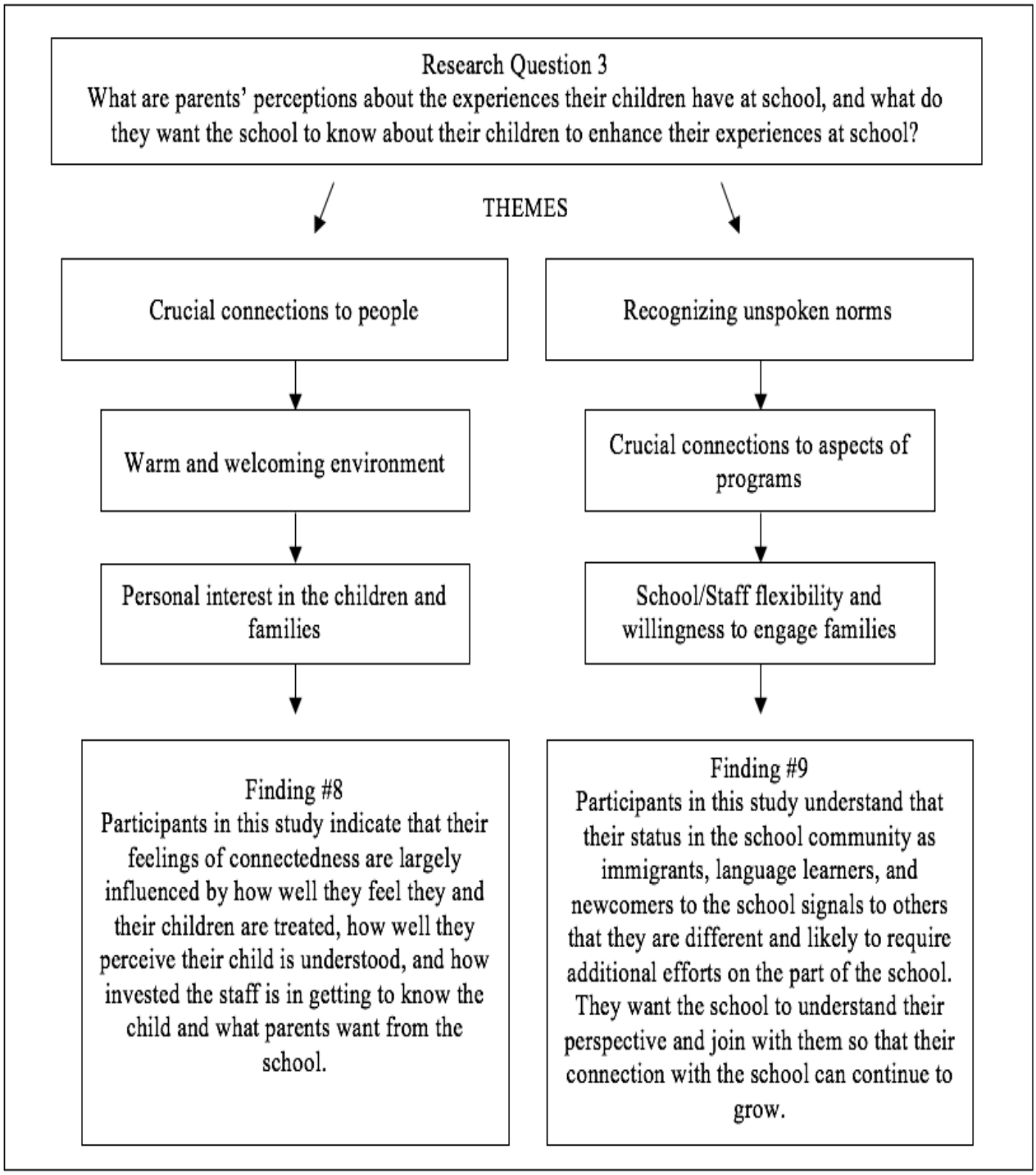


*Figure 5.* Themes and findings relevant to Research Question 3.

## Summary

In this study, the perceptions of parents of English learners about their elementary-aged children's schooling, their expectations for their children's education, and their understanding of their role with regard to their children's education were investigated. The study sought to illuminate the hopes and dreams parents hold for their children and the ways that they make sense of and engage with their children's educational experiences. The data were gathered via a questionnaire administered to 38 participants and follow-up interviews with 10 participants. This chapter was presented in two sections—participant profiles were described and an analysis of the data followed. Data were presented as themes and supporting sub-themes. The data resulted in nine findings. A more comprehensive discussion of the implications for which are presented in Chapter 5, the final chapter.

# CHAPTER 5 – SUMMARIES, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the final chapter is to summarize the study and its findings and discuss the implications for practice, policy, and future research. Chapter 5 is organized into six sections: (a) Introduction; (b) Chapter Summaries; (c) Findings and Implications; (d) Delimitations and Limitations Revisited; (e) Future Research; (f) Final Reflections; and (g) Summary and Conclusions. The Introduction restates the purpose and context of the study, including the rationale for its implementation. The Chapter Summaries section includes a review of each preceding chapter (Chapters 1-4) including the conceptual framework for conducting the study and its research design. The Findings and Implications section discusses the practical and theoretical implications of each finding. Next, the Delimitations and Limitations of the study are revisited. Based on the findings and their implications, the next section has recommendations for Future Research in this area. In the last two sections, the researcher provides his Final Reflections, which describe his personal thoughts and considerations on the process of engaging in this study, and, finally, a Summary and Conclusions section is presented at the end of the chapter.

## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to inquire about the perceptions of parents of English learners about their elementary-aged children's schooling, their expectations for their children's education, and their understanding of their role with regard to their children's education. The study explored parents' understanding of the American school system as well as the relationship parents have both with the school and the educational programming it offers. More broadly, the study sought to illuminate the hopes and dreams parents hold for their children and the ways in which they make sense of and engage with their children's educational experiences.

The following research questions guided the investigation of this study:

1. How knowledgeable are immigrant Spanish-speaking parents about the American school system and American schooling? What do they not understand, and what do they wish to understand better?
2. What do Spanish-speaking parents of children enrolled in a program serving English learners in a U.S. elementary school want for their children from the school? What do they regard as the most important ways in which they can support their child's education?
3. What are parents' perceptions about the experiences their children have at school, and what do they want the school to know about their children to enhance their experiences at school?

## Chapter Summaries

### Chapter 1

Chapter 1 is the introduction to this study. It provides the reader with a statement of the problem and describes the researcher's personal connection and interest to the problem as outlined in the sociological perspective section. This study transpired as a result of the researcher's interest in achieving a better understanding of the interactions between schools and families with English learners. The researcher was raised in a community that had high numbers of ELs, he is an administrator in public education, and he works in a school that serves a large population of ELs. The researcher's personal and professional experiences, including the literature review in Chapter 2, led to a high interest in this topic.

Referencing findings from prior research, the statement of the problem is described, namely that English learners are the fastest growing subgroup of children in the United States and a subgroup identified by current accountability measures as demonstrating low academic

achievement. The complex characteristics of this student population and subsequent contributions of these characteristics to ELs' struggling academic performance is described. School leaders are faced with trying to connect with families and to meet their expectations and improve English learners' performance in school. The Research Questions are introduced in this chapter.

**Chapter 2**

Chapter 2 is a review of research relevant and related to this study. In order to guide the reader and provide context, the chapter provides an introduction to the different bodies of literature to show existing scholarship that is foundational for this study. The research describes the key components of the growing population of English learners in the United States, the historical shifts in policies and practices that represent the responses by school districts to serve these families, and the educational needs of this population over time. In particular, the chapter reviews literature that considers the relationship between the parents of these children and the schools their children attend.

The chapter establishes the value of parent involvement and representation in schools and how both correlate with student achievement. Moreover, recent legislative decisions and policies that have placed greater emphasis schools' need to increase parental engagement are explained. Within this context, the research illuminates that engagement with parents of ELs may not be fully realized relying on traditional models and theories of parental involvement. As a result, the need for new models and new practices by educational leaders to reach parents of ELs is emphasized in the literature. When considering the perspectives of parents of English learners, there are differences in their involvement activities both at home and in the school. When schools consider their preparedness for working with families of English learners, the research

indicates that leaders benefit from actively creating schools where educators understand and practice cultural competence and cultural humility when working with parents of ELs. Moreover, schools can improve interrelationships with these families when they adjust their practices to promote social justice where the onus on engagement is put not on the parents, but on school personnel, and where the educators purposefully work to increase and promote the social capital of parents of ELs.

**Chapter 3**

Chapter 3 is an overview of the methodology and design used in the study. The study used a phenomenological method approach as all participants experienced the phenomenon of being Spanish-speaking parents of elementary school aged children attending an American elementary school. The purpose was to understand a common experience of parents and to provide a common account of their perspective(s).

Parents were invited to a Bilingual Parent Meeting and recruited for the study at an Open House at a K-5 elementary school with a student population of over 500 students. Over 40% of the students in the school are enrolled in either Sheltered English Immersion or Transitional Bilingual Education classes. Because the study took place at the school where the researcher is employed as a principal, precautions that were taken to limit bias and delineate roles between principal and researcher. A questionnaire was administered to 38 participants and ten of these participants were later interviewed. The questionnaire was previously piloted in a similar community with similar demographics. Similarly, the interview questions were piloted with parents from a different school within the district with similar demographics. The results of these experiences allowed the researcher to refine the questions used in both the questionnaire and the interviews.

Spanish-speaking translators were present for both the questionnaire and the interviews. Responses were translated, transcribed, and stored in one of two software programs. Data were analyzed, codes created, and themes were established.

**Chapter 4**

Chapter 4 reviews the data analysis and presents the findings of the study. It describes how the data were organized so that each question was answered. Chapter 4 analyzes the data from the 38 participants who completed the questionnaire and the ten participants who were interviewed. The data are presented around themes, and the framework for their analysis is each research question. Following each research question the findings are presented. The study produced a total of nine findings.

Research Question 1 produced four major themes that helped to illuminate parents' understanding of the American school system. The first was that parents understood that language and cultural differences may be a barrier to their understanding. The second explored the advice parents received from different groups and individuals and how they evaluated this sometimes-disparate advice while they attempted to navigate school and program choice for the first time. A third was parents' understanding of school routines and their interactions with school personnel and how these played a role in understanding. Finally, parents' understanding of assessments and how they affect their children helped to inform their understanding of American schooling as well.

Through an analysis of Research Question 2 and efforts to determine what parents want from the school and what the important ways their child's education can be supported, two themes emerged. First, parents described what they wanted for their children from the school and it included their wishes to reduce anxiety, avoid having their children confused, and

providing them opportunities to "fit-in" with peer groups. There was also an awareness that school was valued and important as parents noted it provided passage or keys to entry to various, future opportunities for their children. Secondly, parents described their wishes for their children beyond public school and emphasis was placed on the importance of their children doing well while in school.

In analyzing what perceptions parents had about the experiences their children had at the school and what they wanted the school to know about their children in Research Question 3, two themes emerged. Parents described that they valued the connections they and their children had with the school and how the environment the school creates has an influence on how they perceive their child's experiences at the school. Parents of English learners also realize that they are different and they perceive that this difference may require the school and the staff to be flexible to meet their needs.

These themes and the sub-themes associated with them led to findings which are presented at the end of the chapter. The findings and their implications are described in greater detail in the following section.

## Discussion of Findings and Implications

This section of the chapter provides a review of each finding related to each research question, and introduces implications for educational leaders and/or policymakers. The framework for this section are the findings from each research question. At the end of this section, implications for future research and scholarship are discussed.

### Research Question 1

The results of the questionnaire and the interviews answered Research Question 1, *"How knowledgeable are immigrant Spanish-speaking parents about the American school system and*

*American schooling? What do they not understand, and what do they wish to understand better?"* The analysis of the data relevant to Research Question 1 ultimately produced the four findings (Findings #1, #2, #3, and #4) described below.

**Finding #1.** *Participants in this study struggle to understand language used by educators and nuances of the American educational system, which pose an obstacle to understanding American schooling.* Parents' comments indicated the school and the school system, specifically through the registration processes, were prepared to a certain degree to assist parents, but they may have not been fully appreciative of the factors that may potentially impede incoming immigrant parents from having a working knowledge of American schools. As a result, parents did not receive clear details that allowed for full understanding of the different options they possessed for choosing a program and school for their children. Furthermore, the evidence indicates parents did not receive information that allowed for an understanding of the different nuances of the American educational system needed to make fully informed choices. The lack of a full and clear overview of these options was a result of the language difficulties parents may have experienced, as well as cultural differences, and/or parents' exposure to new options, systems, and procedures for the first time.

***Implications for educational leaders.*** Educational leaders face a primary challenge when working with parents of English learners – there is a mismatch between United States schooling procedures and the language backgrounds and cultural orientations of immigrant parents. In both the questionnaire and the interviews, participants discussed their first experiences with the American school system. Parents noted gratefulness for having translators who could speak to them in their native language, and expressed how this helped their understanding of the options they had. Working with Spanish-speaking staff seemed to reduce

anxiety, however there were numerous instances where full understanding was nonetheless limited. Unless educational leaders embrace the responsibility to fully inform parents of English learners, these parents will remain at a disadvantage in understanding the many facets, nuances, and idiosyncrasies of the American educational system. Translation is important and it is helpful, but clearly it is not enough.

Educational leaders must remain cognizant that cultural differences and misunderstandings are inevitable when dealing with parents new to the American educational system. There are many potentially novel situations that parents of ELs experience with American education, including the idea of choice in programs and schools as well as their prerogative as caregivers to make such choices. Therefore, leaders need to develop practices and policies that make plain to non-native English speakers the different facets of American schooling. Simply because someone can understand the language being spoken does not mean that there is an understanding of the concepts and the options parents in the United States have with regard to their children's education. Parents' ability to communicate in English on a general level, or their ability to communicate and process translated information, is not an indication that they have a working knowledge of the subtle concepts and complex procedures that have been communicated. Educational leaders must possess the necessary cultural competence and be aware that their own understanding of "Western-style schooling," as described by DeCapua and Marshall (2011, p. 35), present them with assumptions and understandings that the immigrant, families of English learners whom they are serving may not possess.

Being mindful and possessing this awareness will likely lead to additional steps taken by educational leaders that aim to provide these families more complete explanations of options available and a more culturally sensitive system of registration. Educational leaders could

consider revisions and improvements to the registration process based on active input and involvement of experienced, immigrant-parent volunteers who could illuminate their own first experiences with the United States school system (Han and Love (2015) refer to these parents as Cultural Leaders). These parents could offer insight that could help create a system that would better target the needs of parents new to American schooling. Moreover, these experienced parents could also be asked to assist and work at the Parent Information Center with incoming immigrant parents to explain options available more effectively as they provide insights that non-immigrant workers may fail to possess. Furthermore, these experienced, immigrant parents could partner with the Parent Information Center to create informational videos that address not only program and school options and overviews, but they could also include what they anticipate are areas parents of ELs would find beneficial as they work with American schools for the first time. These videos could be made available on-line as well as at the Parent Information Center (PIC) for viewing.

These additional steps would continue to involve translation services but would also include multiple ways for parents to interact with the information being presented. It is difficult to predict what may not be fully understood, but efforts need to be made to describe and explain options fully in a manner that parents may better understand them in their entirety. This should result in parents of ELs possessing a greater understanding of their options and lead to more thoroughly informed decisions.

Furthermore, educational leaders must be mindful that they, and their staffs, should be acutely aware that they are oftentimes at a cultural communication crossroads of whether or not the children's parents understand what they and/or the school are doing to educate their child. These families are seeking to acculturate into a United States school system. They bring with

them their own understanding of schooling based on their own past experiences and through that context, they are being exposed to new options, systems, and methods of schooling. Whether it be the person in the Parent Information Center who makes first contact with parents of ELs during the registration process or the classroom teacher who is attempting to keep parents informed of what is going on in the classroom, educational leaders must ensure that these practitioners display cultural competence when dealing with parents of ELs. As research has shown (Trumbull et al., 2003), through professional development, a better understanding of cultural competence can be elicited to empower practitioners to make improved efforts to engage parents in more meaningful ways and foster a more accurate understanding of their children's educational experience and options.

Educational leaders must emphasize that it is the educators' responsibility—either at an administrative or classroom level—to seek out and find ways to communicate effectively and, thereby, to hear and address parental concerns. Though this may begin with either having Spanish-speakers working with these families or employing translators who speak the language spoken in the home, as the data and research indicates, there are benefits to open channels of two-way communication that need to be established and sustained (Epstein, 1995, 2005; Epstein et al., 2007; McKenna & Millen, 2013). Moreover, for true understanding, practitioners need to engage in practices that go even further, beyond communications in the native language, to provide and promote opportunities for acculturation and full understanding of the American School system and what it has to offer families and children.

**Finding #2.** *Participants in this study experience conflicting advice about school and program choices for their children.* The participants in this study took their prerogative to choose schools and programs seriously and sought advice from family, friends, co-workers, and

the PIC staff. Issues arose as oftentimes the information they were receiving was conflicting information. Parents tended to reach out to individuals, groups of individuals or others with whom they had pre-existing relationships. With the exception of one participant who referenced doing research on-line, no participants mentioned guidance sought or received from organized groups in the community, such as religious groups or advocacy groups, in influencing their decision-making about their child's schooling. Additionally, no participant indicated that accountability data about schools such as English acquisition test scores or achievement scores played a role in their decisions.

The influence of the sources cited is most evident in the decision of choosing schools and bilingual programs in which to enroll their children. This finding is in contrast with the idea often stated in the educational field that the publication of state "report cards" issued for schools help parents in their decision-making. These report cards aim to illuminate historical testing data, teacher-student ratios, and other school growth, performance, and demographic data, yet there was no evidence that participants accessed this information.

***Implications for educational leaders.*** Educational leaders need to possess an awareness that for many parents of ELs, the experience of enrolling their child in an American school is a new experience. The data indicate that parents' decisions will likely be influenced by the many sources of advice they seek out from family, friends, and co-workers; not only from what they receive from school personnel. Parents displayed a desire to be informed by seeking out information and opinions from people or groups of individuals with whom they had a pre-existing relationship. In order to avoid parents' exposure to potentially disparate advice, educational leaders should consider seizing the inclination of parents to seek advice from these different parties. Some of the information that was shared by the people and groups who offered

advice was based on experiences they had with their children from many years earlier. Much of the disparate information parents received could be attributed to the fact that the programs and goals had changed over time, as some of the advice they received was based on previous experiences at the schools when they housed different programs with different goals.

Educational leaders should consider not only systems and methods that inform new parents but that also enlighten the community and community members, upon whom, according to the evidence, parents often call upon to discuss their beliefs about different schools, programs, and opportunities. School and district leaders should assume the responsibility of educating the public as to the offerings and goals of each of the programs the school district offers. This involves a shift in thinking: instead of simply relying on parents learning about the schools when they come to register their children, educational leaders need to educate parents and community members by hosting regular and frequent informational workshops in the community to extoll the benefits, outcomes, and goals of various programs offered in the schools. These workshops could be offered at satellite locations throughout the community where parents and community members live and/or gather to allow for easy access.

Additionally, educational leaders must ensure that registration processes follow a culturally sensitive protocol to all new, incoming parents that aims to provide: (a) a thorough explanation of all the options available to them; (b) a thorough explanation of their rights, as parents, in the United States; and (c) equitable program and school offerings that all parents, regardless of race, ethnicity, primary language, EL status, special education status, socio-economic status, etc. possess. No parents in this study, at any time, discussed anyone taking the time to explain their rights to them as parents or as residents living in the United States.

***Implications for policy.*** Though policymakers have created policies which mandate state reporting of certain school and district information, including the on-line publication and distribution of school and school system "report cards," these were not referred to by participants in this study. Moreover, there are laws aimed to protect families which allow for transfers from schools that have shown historically low performance on achievement tests that parents did not reference on the questionnaire nor during the interviews. The information in these publications has merit when comparing schools and school programs with one another; however, no participants referred to these measures as influencing their decisions to choose a school or program that they inevitably sent their children to attend. The spirit of these mandated policies is to inform parents and the public about the present and historical performance of the schools their children could potentially attend.

District registration policies should include practices and protocols that highlight and review these school and district "report cards," which provide historical measures of student growth and achievement. Furthermore, these policies should highlight parents' rights with regard to their children's potential enrollment in low-performing schools. Explanations for each of these measures should be provided by experienced staff during the registration process to further assist parents with their decision-making when choosing a school. Additionally, for parents of English learners, efforts should be made to illuminate a school's performance with regard to English acquisition test scores; as in any bilingual program, English acquisition is a key indicator of academic achievement (Uriarte et al., 2011). Moreover, Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education should consider different methods of distributing this information to make it more accessible and meaningful to parents. If the information being provided in these publications is not being accessed by an underperforming subgroup such as ELs in guiding their

parents' educational decisions as these findings suggest, then this would obligate policymakers to seek and develop different strategies and systems for either assessing students and/or reporting out results to the public.

**Finding #3.** *Participants in this study maintain that they understand the American School System; however, many of their explanations are based on a comparison with their understanding of their own school experiences in their native countries.* During the interviews, there was an activity that involved participants being asked to draw pictures depicting the relationships between teachers, schools, children, and families in their native country and then to repeat the process for the United States. This activity was designed to elicit comparative responses from all the participants. An additional outcome was that participants, in several different ways, without explicit prompts from the researcher, all offered evaluative statements that the educational experiences in the United States were "better" compared to the experiences in their home countries.

This finding is consistent with the findings of Orozco (2008) and Ogbu and Simons (1998). Their work found that parents' perspectives of their child's educational experiences are seen through the context of their own experiences in their home country. Ogbu and Simons (1998) specifically refer to their cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance which considers a dual frame of reference that first-generation immigrants use when they consider their children's educational situation in the United States. As stated in Chapter 2, the first frame of reference is based on their situation in the United States. The second frame of reference is based on their situation "back home" or in their "place of origin" (p. 170). The authors conclude that immigrants view their present situation as a positive one because they see more opportunities in the United States and because they migrated to this country with the hope that they would do

better than had they stayed in their home country. As a result, they "conclude that they are doing better or are seeing better opportunities for their children in the United States" (p. 170).

***Implications for educational leaders.*** It is important for educational leaders to be aware that many of the experiences that parents of ELs, children, and families have with the American educational system are novel experiences, especially when compared to past experiences in their home countries. Educational leaders additionally need to understand that immigrant parents may be situating these novel experiences in the context of their home-country experiences, and hence, may be missing and/or may not be aware of important, particular components of American schooling. In other words, parents of ELs may have a frame of reference that may inhibit their ability to understand fully the breadth of possibilities that they and their children possess as participants in American schools and persons living in the United States. Their frame of reference may preclude them from fully being aware of their rights as American residents and the potential for accommodations they deserve on their and their children's behalf. This reference frame may not allow them to realize their full potential to work with the school and school personnel as partners with regards to their child's education.

There are data from this study that show that parents were pleased and satisfied with their child's schooling experiences. There is an inherent caution to educators within this line of thinking—positive feedback from immediate families to school personnel may simply be based on families' frame of reference, and educators need to be circumspect because these parents may not be gaining the full agency of which they are capable and which they deserve. As a result, practitioners should take the time to explain the different facets of the schooling English learners are experiencing and be methodical with explaining parents' and children's options as well as the possible outcomes of such options.

For instance, if the ideas of choice—in terms of both programs and schools—is novel to parents, not only do they need to be aware of the different choices for consideration, but they also need to understand that the American educational system assumes that parents have an understanding of their own prerogative and they therefore possess a responsibility to make informed choices. Though this seems like a subtle nuance, it is critical; an awareness of this subtlety will urge educational leaders to take on the responsibility of informing and supporting parents in realizing this responsibility.

**Finding #4.** *Participants in this study maintain that testing is valuable to the school and to them as parents; however, their defense does not specify how these assessment efforts have relevance or importance for their particular children.* Parents' comments indicate that they believe testing is important and informative to them as parents and to the school yet when follow-up questions were asked regarding the relevance of tests such as the ACCESS English acquisition tests and/or MCAS/PARCC testing parents struggled to articulate what, in particular, about these tests and/or the results of these tests had value. Several parents showed a lack of true understanding of the goals of these tests and failed to identify what skills the tests were assessing (English acquisition, achievement, and/or growth in ELA, Math, and/or Science and Technology). Similar to the implications from Finding #2, this lack of a full understanding of the benefits of testing is a concern as the intentions of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's publication of school and district report cards are aimed to inform parents and the public of historical test data.

***Implications for educational leaders.*** Educational leaders have a responsibility to disseminate information to parents in a way that it is meaningful to them. Though the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education provides informational

pamphlets to be distributed with test scores in most languages that have been identified as spoken in Massachusetts homes, the evidence from this study indicates that these efforts are not sufficient to help families understand the state assessment systems. As Epstein's (1995) theory of overlapping spheres of influence illuminates, family and community play critical, overlapping roles in the involvement of parents in their child's schooling experiences. Parents cannot be involved in meaningful ways if they are receiving information from the schools or the community that they do not fully understand. Furthermore, drawing conclusions on the value of such testing without a complete understanding of what the testing is measuring can potentially lead to misinformed decisions about their child's education.

Educational leaders should consider additional steps to inform parents and the community about tests and testing. While schools are mandated to send these scores and information pamphlets home to families, educational leaders should consider planning and hosting testing informational sessions with translators and experienced immigrant parents of children present to assist. These sessions should take place prior to students taking these tests as well as following the release and distribution of the test scores. Especially important is for leaders to elicit parental input in planning of such events both in terms of when and where they are to be held as well as what content should be reviewed to provide parents with information they need and can use. These sessions could provide parents with additional context for the tests, a description of what testing conditions their children will experience, and what value the test scores have to them as parents as well as to the school. More importantly, these informational experiences could lead to further engagement opportunities as the educators could use this opportunity to inquire how parents interact with their children academically in the home and to share ideas and activities that parents may try to support their child's educational experience at

school. Moreover, when the scores are sent home, a thorough, personalized, explanation could be given at these face-to-face meetings to inform and assure parents that they may not receive from a pamphlet attached to test scores from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

**Research Question 2**

The results of the questionnaire and the interviews answered Research Question 2, *"What do Spanish-speaking parents of children enrolled in a program serving English learners in a U.S. elementary school want for their children from the school? What do they regard as the most important ways in which they can support their child's education?"* The analysis of the data relevant to Research Question 2 ultimately produced three findings (Findings #5, #6, and #7) which are discussed below. Because two findings (Finding #5 and Finding #6) concern language, either the acquisition and/or the maintenance of language, the implications apply to both and they are discussed together. A discussion of the implications for Finding #7 follows.

**Finding #5.** *Participants in this study demonstrate concern over their children's English language acquisition and how English proficiency functions as a factor in acculturation to the United States.*

**Finding #6.** *Participants in this study indicate a preference for their children to remain bilingual but vary in how they expect to foster Spanish language development.*

As parents of children enrolled in either a Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) or a Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) program, language and language acquisition were issues that were highlighted by participants in both the questionnaire and the interviews in numerous and different ways. First, parents were clear that they wanted their children to learn and become fluent in English. Several different reasons were stated for this aspiration. Parents expressed

that they wanted their children to "fit-in" with their peers as they noted learning English was a critical component toward acculturation to the United States. Moreover, parents identified that English acquisition was necessary for their children to both succeed academically in school as well as to create opportunities in post-schooling situations in college and/or the workforce. Finally, some parents noted that their children's acquisition of English would benefit their own English acquisition as many were learning English from their children. How parents wanted their children to learn English varied as some parents preferred their children be placed in an SEI classroom and learn English in an English-only academic instructional setting, while others preferred that their children learn English more gradually through ESL courses in the school while concurrently receiving their content Spanish in a TBE setting.

In addition, parents also expressed that they wanted their children to be bilingual in both Spanish and English. As parents differed on the preferred methods for English acquisition, there were also variances in parent preferences as to how they believed their children would become bilingual and continue to learn and/or maintain their Spanish language. Moreover, the reasons parents provided for their preference to have their children be bilingual also varied. Some parents noted the practicality of bilingualism in their family as they needed to communicate with their children, and they and/or other family members and close friends primarily spoke in Spanish. Others highlighted that by learning Spanish and English, their children would have more opportunities beyond their primary and secondary schooling in the workforce, as parents anticipated a continued demand by employers for bilingual speakers. As noted earlier, some parents wanted the school to teach their children academic Spanish in the TBE program, whereas others explained that they would take responsibility to teach their children Spanish in the home.

One parent believed her child was enrolled in the Two-Way bilingual school and that the school was teaching her child both Spanish and English although, in actuality, this was not the case.

***Implications for educational leaders.*** The acquisition of language is a prominent theme that arose quite often in the responses of participants in both the questionnaire as well as in the interviews. Educational leaders need to be aware that there is a lot of confusion with regards to goals and outcomes of the different programs that are offered to English learners, and parents expressed several misunderstandings with regard to such language acquisition programs and goals in this study.

Educational leaders should not only be transparent with regards to the goals and outcomes of the programs they offer, but they should take additional steps to further engage in efforts to act as ambassadors for bilingual education and to educate and inform not only the parents they serve but also the community and government leaders who have a stake in supporting the schools. The findings indicate that there is a need for educational leaders to foster dialogue and communication about the theories, research findings, and political perspectives influencing school educational choices and practices. The evidence reveals that there exists both misinformation and a lack of information about the efficacy of these programs as well as the goals of each program. Annual workshops and presentations should be offered to local government leaders, parents, and the general public in order to wed the scholarly theories of language acquisition with the goals and outcomes of the different programs in the district. Additionally, in these workshops, businesses could also be invited to extoll the benefits of hiring bilingual workers and explain the difficulty in finding high-quality staff, who are fluent in more than one language.

Moreover, it is of concern that all the parents interviewed expressed that they wanted their children to be bilingual in both Spanish and English and there was evidence that there were instances where there was misunderstanding regarding the program their child was actually enrolled in and/or the goals and expected outcomes of the different programs the district offers. Educational leaders have a responsibility to meet parents' needs as well as to educate parents as to what research supports as the programs most suited to meet these needs. If the goal for all the parents was to have their children be bilingual, these children may have been better served in this endeavor had they enrolled in the Two-Way bilingual program that the district offered instead of in TBE or SEI. As noted above, educational leaders need to improve their practices during registration to illicit a clear understanding of parents' wishes, to educate parents on the different goals and outcomes of the different programs offered, and to encourage parents to choose a program that research indicates is best suited to meet parents' preferred goals for their children's education.

***Implications for policy.*** This research took place in Massachusetts, one of three states that passed ballot referenda questions restricting native-language instructional practices in schools. The results of these referenda are not grounded in research on language development, language acquisition, nor on the efficacy of program models for English learners. In addition, the comments of the participants in this study indicate several misunderstandings about language development and language acquisition theories supported by research. Several parents expressed the familiar but discredited notion that when children are learning at school in two languages (Spanish and English) they risk becoming confused. There are several meta-analyses studies that support the efficacy of dual-language programming and learning in two languages, most notably the meta-analyses of Thomas and Collier (2002) and Collier and Thomas (2004) yet their

findings are not reflected in the outcomes of the referenda questions. Other parents appeared confused as to what bilingual program their child was enrolled in and what the goals were of the different programs.

Educational policymakers need to create policies that allow varied programming for English learners that is grounded in research and aims to support both the academic achievement of students as well as their English acquisition. Educational policy should support English learners, their academic interests, and the wishes of their parents. Policies that restrict parent choice, are not grounded in research, and can potentially limit the success of a marginalized group of children should not be decided by majority-rule voter referenda. Policymakers have a responsibility to rely on the research on bilingual programming to educate the public on the efficacy, goals, and benefits of such programs, so the populace may become better educated about them. Furthermore, they also have a responsibility to pass policy and legislation that allows for programing and experiences for English learners that are supported by research and aim to create equitable access to all children in public education.

**Finding #7.** *Participants in this study express the desire for their children to demonstrate success in school and life with the hope that they will have a greater number of options and opportunities in their future.* Parents expressed, in numerous ways, that they wanted their children to gain agency in the United States, to have more opportunities than they perceived they, the parents, presently experience. Overwhelmingly, they believed that their moving to the United States and sending their children to an American school was an important step in providing their children greater opportunities than they had experienced or their children had experienced in their home country. Parents expressed gratitude for the opportunities the American school provided their children.

***Implications for educational leaders.*** Educational leaders need to be cognizant of the context in which parents of ELs judge their child's schooling. Though they may show gratefulness with regards to the school's offerings, leaders need to know that many of these parents have yet to attain full agency with regard to their child's schooling. As a result, parents may not be fully aware of all opportunities available to their child and their opportunities to intervene and be involved with the school on behalf of their children. As these families acculturate to United States schools, leaders must be aware that this is a new experience for them, and that they may struggle with their understanding that in the United States, parents who know their advocacy rights have a greater voice in the schools. Because the options and opportunities the children will possess in their future may be reliant on the experiences they have in school, educational leaders need to take additional and necessary steps to engage immigrant, bilingual parents to help them be aware of their choices and to give them voice in their child's education.

Similar to the implications for educational leaders found above for Finding #3, educational leaders can recognize and embrace that their responsibility includes helping parents of ELs find their voice and have a voice in the schools. As Zambrana and Zoppi's (2002) research indicates, Latino families' cultural capital in schools is negatively affected by school personnel who are not competent "in engaging in (their – the families of English learners) cultural values and strengths" (p. 48). Parents of ELs cannot be viewed using a deficit model of thinking where teacher's interpretation of parents' culture or their situations are looked at as being a burden on the school system or being misaligned with past school practices. Instead, educators must view these families from an additive model of thinking and realize that these children and families have a lot to offer the school, that they are equal members of the school

community, and that it is the school's responsibility to adjust and realign practices to meet their needs.

To engage parents of ELs, educational leaders need to consider newer models of parent involvement to give them voice and to provide opportunities to contribute to the school community. Auerbach (2007) suggests considering the Delgado-Gaitan (1994) empowerment model of family-school relations "in which power is shared, influence is two-way between home and school, and parties are mutually accommodating, in contrast to the conventional one-way (traditional) model dominated by the school's needs and expectations" (p. 254). Auerbach's work is grounded in considering the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997) model of parent involvement which considers parent perspectives and the elaboration of the concept of parent role construction. This model "theorizes that parent role construction is the key predictor in whether parents become actively engaged in their children's education" (p. 255). Being familiar with this model and considering where parents, who are served by the school, fall within the model will help education leaders to consider and develop efforts to move parents along the spectrum and help them to construct their role in the school to encourage meaningful interactions with parents of ELs.

The critical point is education leaders have to consider doing things differently to give parents of ELs voice and improved social capital. Auerbach (2007) sees this effort involving multiple steps:

> First, we should broaden the value-laden, traditional, middle-class definition of what counts as parent involvement to include more open-ended, emic notions of parent support … for children's education, advancement, and well-being. Second, we should help educators understand that such support takes multiple forms—

> some invisible to the school—shaped primarily by parents' social location but also by a web of cultural and psychosocial factors in specific home, school, and community contexts. Third, we must recognize that legitimate goals for parent support extend beyond raising achievement to helping students navigate the system and ensuring their access and opportunity, especially in communities of color with legacies of limited access. Fourth, educators need to engage the broad school community in anticipating, understanding, and reducing sources of conflict in home-school relations, starting with removing barriers to access and communication and responding flexibly to advocacy efforts by/for marginalized families. (p. 278)

Only through this increased two-way engagement will educational leaders move closer to fully ascertain parents' wishes and dreams for their children. As a result, schools can then work with parents to create and provide opportunities for their children that they seek and desire.

**Research Question 3**

The results of the questionnaire and the interviews answered Research Question 3, *"What are parents' perceptions about the experiences their children have at school, and what do they want the school to know about their children to enhance their experiences at school?"* The analysis of the data relevant to Research Question 3 ultimately produced two findings (Findings #8 and #9) which are described below. The implications for Finding #8 and Finding #9 are interrelated so they are addressed together below each finding summary.

**Finding #8.** *Participants in this study indicate that their feelings of connectedness are largely influenced by how well they feel they and their children are treated, how well they perceive their child is understood, and how invested the staff is in getting to know the child and*

*what parents want from the school.* When parents expressed judgment toward the school, overwhelmingly these were associated with how they felt they had been treated and/or how they perceived their children were treated at the school. This treatment was a measure of how parents felt welcomed at the school and experienced a connection to the school and to the staff at the school. The greater the positive feelings the school could generate, the greater the connection. These connections for both parents and children were a result of how they felt the staff respected them and their children, how well they felt the staff understood their child, and how invested they felt the staff were in their children.

**Finding #9.** *Participants in this study understand that their status in the school community as immigrants, language learners, and newcomers to the school signals to others that they are different and likely to require additional efforts on the part of the school. They want the school to understand their perspective and join with them so that their connection with the school can continue to grow*. Parents of ELs want to connect with the school community. They want to acculturate. They want the school to understand and meet their needs so their connection with the school can continue to grow. Parents showed an awareness that they, and their children, had particular needs as a result of their being immigrants and being English learners. Moreover, parents expressed gratitude when the school was able to both recognize and meet these needs.

***Implications for educational leaders.*** Policies and procedures put in place and supported by educational leaders need to reflect the importance of creating a welcoming and respectful environment for the parents of ELs and their children. Leaders must understand that these families, who are new to American educational systems, seek connections as they attempt to gain agency in the school and in the community. Schools and school personnel need to establish and follow policies to greet these families respectfully and to have the staff working with these

parents and children make efforts to know and invest in these families. The data show that this can be accomplished by having bilingual staff available to translate for parents and to work with their children, regardless of the language program in which they are enrolled. Additionally, the staff need to be conscious of the fact that regardless of parents' situations or needs, they should be warm, welcoming, and respectful at all times. Teachers and staff need to be invested in getting to know the children and families through regular, two-way communication with the home and by sharing with parents an understanding of their and their children's particular needs.

Educational leaders must also recognize that parents expressed understanding of difference is their responsibility to remedy. In addition to efforts to create a warm and respectful atmosphere, educational leaders must work to increase the social capital of parents of ELs so that they do not feel different and instead, understand that they are equal members of the school community. This is an issue of social justice. Schools and school leaders must take on the responsibility to interact with parents of marginalized groups in ways that they become equal participants in their child's education, valued participants in the school community, and empowered with an understanding of their rights and responsibilities as parents. As noted in Chapter 2, Katsarou et al. (2010) define social justice as "the day-to-day processes and actions utilized in classrooms and communities centered in critical analysis, action, and reflection (praxis) amongst all educational stakeholders (students, families, teachers, administrators, community organizations, community members) with the goal of creating tangible change in their communities, cities, states, nation, and the larger world" (p. 139).

Building a school culture and school community where social justice is the goal is the responsibility of the educational leaders. The work of Cazden (2012) illuminates the importance of parents of ELs participating in a system that provides them the dimensions of recognition and

representation. She notes how when school policy is dictated by referenda that are decided in the voting booth, these policies fail to take into account minority viewpoints and attitudes of minority populations. Lopez (2003) encourages full representation through activities such as community organizing and allowing parents to focus on issues directly affecting them. In addition, the research of Ishimaru (2014) further extolls the benefits of District-Community organizing and coalitions to improve the mindset of the community in working with these families by shifting the language used when looking at their needs as a "problem" to instead viewing all children's needs in the district as a "shared responsibility" between school and community. A district she studied in Oregon reorganized its structure to bring EL issues to the core, launched district-wide professional development for teaching ELs, and provided support, and eventually resources, to the Coalition to educate and empower low-income Latino parents in the district (p. 23). Ishimaru (2014) found that:

> Districts and schools that collaborate with community organizing groups can augment their social resources and expertise, particularly in reaching out to low-income Latino parents and effectively educating their children. Yet, the dominant institutional scripts in schools—about the role of parents, professional authority, and control—suggest the complexity of efforts to improve parent-school relations. Those seeking to build meaningful parent and community participation in schools would do well to move beyond traditional forms of parent involvement in the journey toward deeper engagement and collaboration. (p. 2)

Abandoning traditional methods of involving parents may be a difficult task but when these traditional methods disproportionately include certain groups they need to be adjusted.

## Delimitations and Limitations Revisited

### Delimitations

There were several different variables that delimited the scope of this study specifically with regards to who participated and what the shared demographics were of the participants. This study did not analyze the attitudes and perceptions of teachers, nor did it consider the attitudes of students. The sample populations only included immigrant Spanish-speaking parents of elementary-aged children. Other controlled variables were that the participants were parents of English learners. Only the viewpoints of parents of elementary English learners were considered.

### Limitations

There were limitations to this research. The parents participating in this study are not representative of all immigrant-parents, Latinos, nor are they representative of all parents of English learners. The study involved small sample sizes and generalization to larger populations is limited. Parents participating in this study each had unknown previous experiences and histories which likely had an effect on their responses. The validity of the data collection instruments that were used have not been proven; therefore, they should not be considered standard measurement instruments; instead the validity of the data should be considered for this study only.

## Future Research

As the student population of English learners continues to grow in the United States and given the recent historical stagnation of these students' standardized test scores there will continue to be a need for more research with this population of students and their families. More specifically, there is a need for more research on how schools and educational leaders can engage

with immigrant parents of English learners, how these parents can come to understand their choices within the American school system, how school leaders may communicate with these families, and how immigrant parents may be provided the social capital they are entitled to possess.

Though Epstein's (2007) framework of parental involvement is considered a leading model in the field of education, other models need to continue to be further researched and considered which are specific to parents of English learners. Several authors have studied this phenomenon and either proposed theories or alternative models that are more focused on considering the needs of this population (Auerbach, 2007; Barrueco et al., 2015; Han & Love, 2015; Sosa, 1996). As noted in Chapter 2, Auerbach suggests schools re-conceptualize parent involvement of marginalized families:

> Similar to students, parents come to schools with unequal resources for pursuing educational goals and with complex raced/classed/gendered identities, cultural scripts, and family histories or dynamics that shape their relations with institutions. Just as schools need to affirm and accommodate marginalized students, so too, do schools need to transform their understandings of and interactions with working-class parents of color. (p. 276)

She argues school's should broaden mainstream definitions of parental involvement to include more "open-minded, emic notions of parent support for children's education, advancement, and well-being" (p. 276). More research is needed in this area in order to inform educational leaders and practitioners to realize this practice.

Given the realities and profound effect that legislative shifts in policies and mandates have had on the methods of instruction that English learners receive in schools, more research is

needed to inform policymakers and educational leaders in the area of educating both the public and the parents of these children with regards to program efficacy. As noted in Chapter 2, the historical ebb and flow of policies to educate ELs have played a large role in the addition and retraction of options available to parents of ELs for their children. This is exacerbated by the fact that ELs are one of the lowest performing subgroups of children in the United States as measured by achievement testing. Though there have been meta-analysis studies that have reviewed the efficacy and outcomes of various program models (Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002), there seems to be a need for additional research in this area as previous findings have not been embraced by the parents of English learners nor the general public.

State referenda in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts have led to policies and practices that do not align with the findings of this previously completed research. In addition, as Lee's (1998) research suggests, there is a disconnect between what parents of English learners believe they understand about bilingual programming and what is actually understood. This study's findings illuminated similar confusion as several parents appeared unacquainted with the goals of the programs in which their children were enrolled, and/or their personal stated goals for their children's language acquisition failed to align with the goals of the program in which they were enrolled. New research and existing research needs to be brought to the forefront to help educate all who have a stake in bilingual programming, including voters, especially if program choices for ELs continue to be decided in the voter booth.

An additional area for further research involves efforts to communicate with immigrant parents. Parental engagement begins with possessing the ability for schools and parents to communicate with each other effectively. Educational leaders could benefit from having a better understanding of how to best communicate with immigrant parents (by phone, texting, email,

notes in Friday folders, internet?) so messages are delivered in ways that they are consumable and parents feel they are able to readily communicate with the school. Additionally, venues and meeting places should also be considered with this research to allow for good representation of all subgroups served within the school.

In this study, invitations to participate were sent home in Friday folders and a robo-call was administered to approximately 200 families. Of the 200, 38 participants responded to the questionnaire. Of the 38, 27 indicated that they would be willing to be interviewed. Of the 27, only 13 left accurate contact information and of the 13, arrangements could only be made with ten to be interviewed. Organizing the interview times and finding a venue that was accessible to participants was onerous as participants had different needs thus it was difficult to engage with them for the purposes of this study. As several implications noted above suggest workshops and informational meetings with parents and the community, there is a need for research that specifically considers methods of communication and venues to host such meetings where immigrant parents would feel most comfortable and show a greater willingness to participate. This research need is an example that further illuminates the point that new and extra efforts are needed to engage with parents of ELs. Educational practitioners are working with these families every day; they could take more ownership of the research process and follow an analytical cycle of inquiry and do their own action research to solve this practical issue.

Finally, another area for further research is with efforts to increase the social capital of parents of ELs in the name of social justice. The preparation and professional development of the educators tasked with working with English learners and families are critical in this area. Educational leaders can make sure their staffs receive professional development to teach them cultural competence, cultural humility, and to foster an environment that aims for social justice.

As noted in Chapter 2, Trumbull et al. (2003) experienced success in working with educators and found "with some professional development on cultural value systems, committed teachers can take important steps to understand families and bring about deepened relationships with parents, greater parent involvement in schooling, and positive effects on students" (p. 66). In addition, the educational field in general could benefit from more research concerning the integration of the concept of cultural humility into educator preparation programs, using the preparation work that is done in the medical field as a model. As such, future research could consider the work of Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) where they define the three areas of focus for the educators who are in power: (a) continuous self-evaluation and self-critique; (b) a desire to fix power imbalances; and (c) a commitment to systematically advocate for others (p. 117). Teachers and educational leaders would benefit from more research in this area as they too could gain from a better awareness of the imbalance of power that exists when working with immigrant, bilingual families.

## Final Reflections

I have learned a tremendous amount while conducting this research, analyzing the data and writing this manuscript. First and foremost, I have gained a whole new perspective on how important, difficult, and valuable it is to seek out and listen to a group of parents who traditionally are not the most vocal group in the schools we serve. If schools and education are the great equalizer and classrooms are the place where, according to former United States Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, educators need to be "promoting opportunity and reducing inequality" (p. 139), then it is imperative that these families' voices be heard. This requires a deliberate effort to petition for the input of these families through methods not typically employed by many public schools; undoubtedly, this will require additional work on the part of

teachers and school leaders who serve these families and children. I believe this research illuminates that this is a valuable and important endeavor.

I've learned that the parents of these children, by immigrating from their native countries and relocating to the United States, have shown a tremendous level of courage and fortitude. They want nothing more than to provide their children a greater opportunity than they experienced. They are grateful for the efforts schools make to engage with them, yet there are clear gaps in their understanding and their ability to gain the agency needed to fully engage and have their perceptions understood by the educators working with their children. Given the historical struggles in the achievement performance of ELs, and the time it takes for them to acquire academic English to acculturate fully into a school's culture, leaders and researchers need to focus more time and more scholarship on this population. These research opportunities should begin with an exploration of engagement with the parents of these children.

This experience has further strengthened my belief that the educational experiences of English learners, and, possibly, their potential fate as productive citizens in the United States, should not rest on the whims of politicians nor should they be determined by decisions, democratic or political, that are not based on research. Instead, educational leaders and advocates of bilingual education need to lead and advocate for these children and their families through the promotion of ideas and theories in bilingual education that are grounded in research.

I am dismayed that being an immigrant in the United States seems to have taken on an unjustified negative stigmatism. This needs to change at the school level, at the community level, and at the federal level. Though it may be true that bilingual families and students may need more resource-intensive support while they acculturate into the United States and schools, these students (and parents), with the appropriate supports, can and do possess the capacity to

succeed as well as anyone. Moreover, what seems to be lost in this thinking is the recognition that these families have a tremendous amount to offer to the schools they attend, their communities, and the United States. This experience has strengthened my resolve to continue and increase my advocacy for these children and their families.

I plan to seek out and find further opportunities to continue the academic study of parents of English learners as well as students who are English learners. Additionally, I am eager to pursue certain professional opportunities to create conditions to untangle the options and opportunities immigrant families face when enrolling their children in an American school system.

First, I will increase my efforts to create a newcomers' program for families in grades K-8 in the district where I am a principal. The purpose of this program would be twofold, to improve the education and acculturation of new parents to the program offerings and opportunities within an American school system and to increase meaningful two-way interaction between these parents and families with the school system. Within this program, several of the implications cited above would be specifically addressed. For instance, the district would engage in taking on new practices to take responsibility to educate immigrant families; this would create and foster new opportunities for these new families to interact with school personnel and more experienced immigrant parents. Additionally, as part of the program, meetings would be arranged where topics like program options, program choice and enrollment, and standardized testing could be reviewed and explained. Opportunities for schools to be involved with parents and parents to be involved with the schools would also be explored and as a result, schools may be more inclined to shift their current practices after hearing from parents who are immigrants and newcomers.

Additionally, I will encourage the district I work in to reconsider the bilingual programming options offered to Spanish speaking ELs in our district. As the data from this study indicates, 100% of the parents interviewed wanted their children to become bilingual in English and Spanish yet when they were given the opportunity to enroll their children in the district's Two-Way bilingual program, they turned it down and instead enrolled their children in either TBE or SEI. Studies (Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002) indicate that Two-Way and dual language bilingual programs are the most effective longitudinal programs for students when measuring achievement as well as English acquisition. If bilingualism was a goal for these families, their decision to not enroll their children in the districts Two-Way program may have been a result of being misinformed of that program's goals and/or what research shows is the most effective program. I plan to advocate for our district to expand our Two-Way offerings, including a dual language program and to better encourage families, through better systems of educating them outlined above, to enroll their children in these programs in lieu of transitional bilingual and sheltered English options.

In addition to learning more about the importance of engaging parents of ELs, I have also learned several personal lessons about the importance of working hard at something that is regarded and important. Conducting this research and writing this dissertation has been a long journey and one where I have learned many lessons about who I am, what I value, and who I want to become. The process of puzzling through the complexities of these topics and wrestling with all the possible interpretations of the information participants shared has been an enlightening and rewarding experience. The entire endeavor required complex effort and reaped great consequences. I will forever be fully aware that we all "fill our buckets" in different ways and at different rates; I am very pleased that I was able to stick with the work and see this study

through to an end. I am also keenly aware that each ending is a new beginning. I look forward to new opportunities for further inquiry for myself and others as a result of this experience.

Lastly, I cannot state strongly enough that I have the highest admiration and regard for immigrant parents of English learners. I am incredibly humbled to have had the opportunity to hear the personalized stories these parents shared with me. Being a parent is difficult and I am appreciative that these parents took the time to share their successes, struggles, and the hopes and dreams they have for their children. I am truly astounded by the courage they displayed to uproot and move their families from their home country to the United States. Their ability to take on new challenges, learn, and prosper in a new culture is honorable. Equally impressive is that parents of ELs do this while continuing to foster and maintain precious elements of their own culture. I am forever grateful that I had the chance to interact with them as a result of this work. They each taught me a tremendous amount.

## Summary and Conclusion

This qualitative, phenomenological study aimed to investigate the perceptions of parents of English learners about their elementary-aged children's schooling, their expectations for their children's education, and their understanding of their role with regard to their children's education. The focus of the existing literature explored the history of the education of bilingual students in the United States and presented the reader with an overview of parent participation research and research specific to engaging parents of English learners. This inquiry explored parents' understanding of the American school system as well as the relationship parents have with the school and with their child's education and produced nine findings. A discussion of these findings and their implications and how they impact educational leaders was discussed in Chapter 5. Additionally, future research was suggested to assist educational leaders in their

quest to serve these students and their families. This study revealed the need for future research specific to this population of students and illuminated the need for educational leaders to create policies and procedures that exhibit an awareness of the particular needs of immigrant families and English learners.

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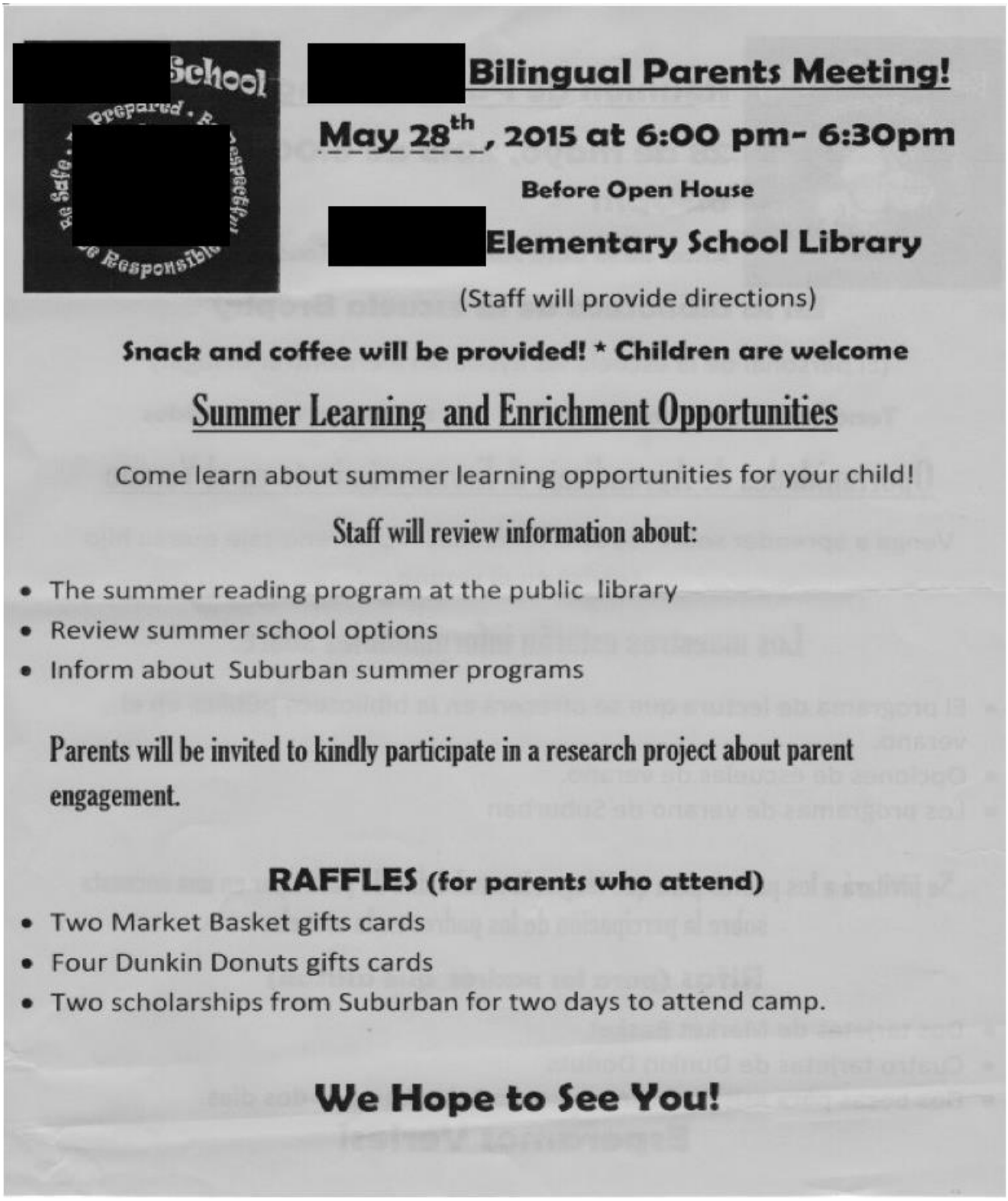
## Appendix A

**Bilingual Parent Meeting Flyer in English**



[redacted] School

Prepared · R… Respectful… Responsible

[redacted] **Bilingual Parents Meeting!**

**May 28th, 2015 at 6:00 pm- 6:30pm**

**Before Open House**

[redacted] **Elementary School Library**

(Staff will provide directions)

**Snack and coffee will be provided! * Children are welcome**

**Summer Learning and Enrichment Opportunities**

Come learn about summer learning opportunities for your child!

**Staff will review information about:**

- The summer reading program at the public library
- Review summer school options
- Inform about Suburban summer programs

**Parents will be invited to kindly participate in a research project about parent engagement.**

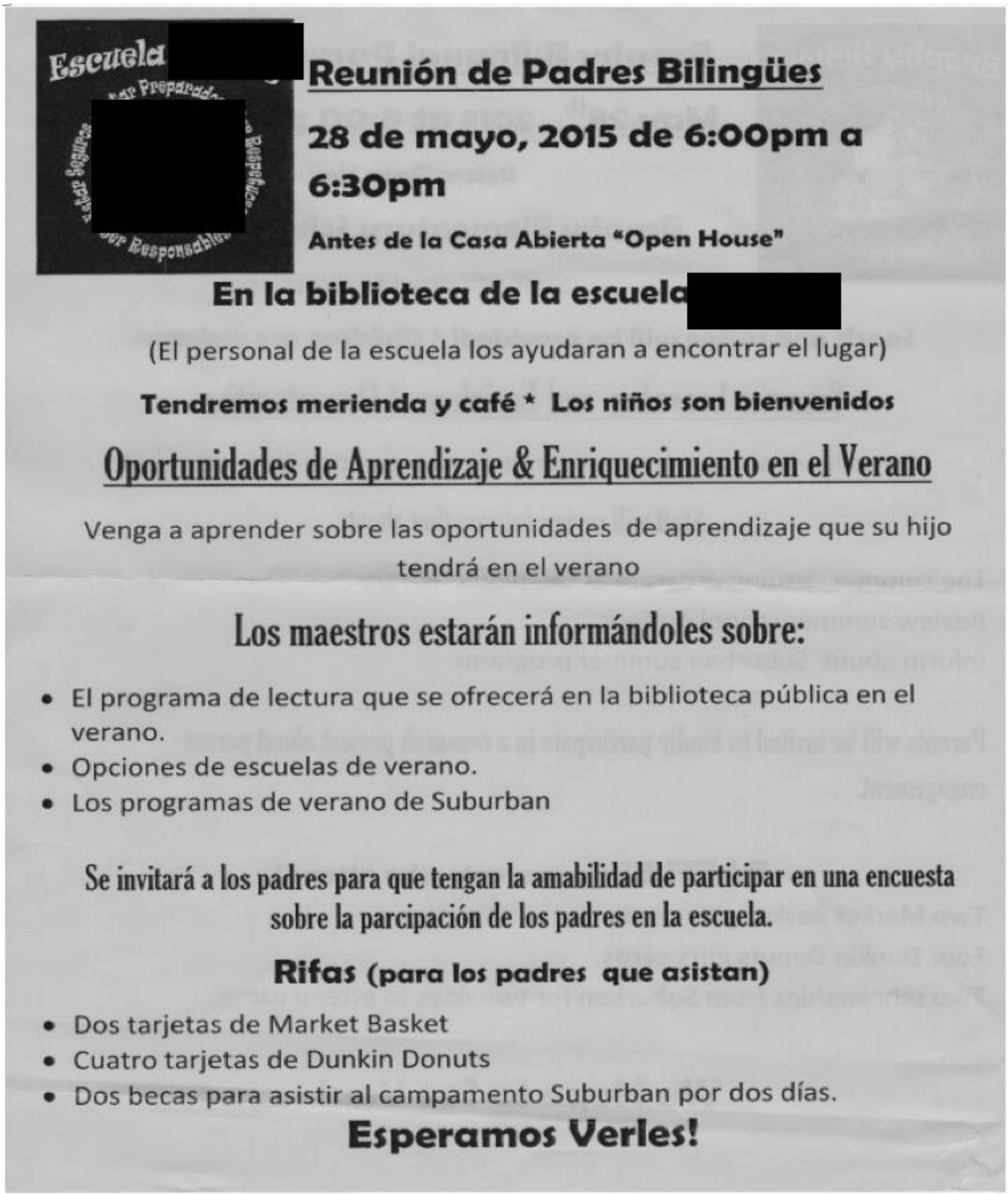
**RAFFLES (for parents who attend)**

- Two Market Basket gifts cards
- Four Dunkin Donuts gifts cards
- Two scholarships from Suburban for two days to attend camp.

**We Hope to See You!**

## Appendix B

**Bilingual Parent Meeting Flyer in Spanish**



Escuela [redacted]

**Reunión de Padres Bilingües**

**28 de mayo, 2015 de 6:00pm a 6:30pm**

**Antes de la Casa Abierta "Open House"**

**En la biblioteca de la escuela** [redacted]

(El personal de la escuela los ayudaran a encontrar el lugar)

**Tendremos merienda y café * Los niños son bienvenidos**

**Oportunidades de Aprendizaje & Enriquecimiento en el Verano**

Venga a aprender sobre las oportunidades de aprendizaje que su hijo tendrá en el verano

**Los maestros estarán informándoles sobre:**

- El programa de lectura que se ofrecerá en la biblioteca pública en el verano.
- Opciones de escuelas de verano.
- Los programas de verano de Suburban

**Se invitará a los padres para que tengan la amabilidad de participar en una encuesta sobre la parcipación de los padres en la escuela.**

**Rifas (para los padres que asistan)**

- Dos tarjetas de Market Basket
- Cuatro tarjetas de Dunkin Donuts
- Dos becas para asistir al campamento Suburban por dos días.

**Esperamos Verles!**

## Appendix C

**Staff Meeting – Talking Points**

1. Introduce the research I am doing. Explain what I will be doing and give a rough timeline estimate.

2. Share and review my research questions.

3. Emphasize that in no way is my research a reflection on anyone working in our school, that I will not use the research to 'judge' anyone, and that I am not doing this to evaluate our school. Instead, I am doing this research to learn from parents to better inform school leaders in all schools.

4. If anyone has any question or concerns about what I am doing, please do not hesitate to see me. I want to be transparent throughout the process in as much as possible.

## Appendix D

**Questionnaire – English**

Dear Friends, Greetings! Saludos! Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Ph.D. program at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I am conducting a study. The purpose of the study is to understand the thoughts and expectations of native Spanish-speaking parents about their children's education. Your answers to these questions will help me very much. The title of my dissertation will be "Perspectives and Expectations of Native Spanish-speaking Parents about Their Children's Education in an American Elementary School. "You may choose not to participate. You may stop at any time or answer only the questions you want to answer. Thank you. Best Regards, Mr. Frank Rothwell Doctoral Candidate Lesley University

Q1 CONSENT: I give my consent to participate in the study described above.
- ❍ Yes (1)
- ❍ No (2)

Q2 How many children do you have?

Q3 How many of your children attend this school this year?

Q4 Please select as many as apply. How are you related to the children who attend this school?
- ❑ Mother (1)
- ❑ Father (2)
- ❑ Sister (3)
- ❑ Brother (4)
- ❑ Aunt (5)
- ❑ Uncle (6)
- ❑ Grandmother (7)
- ❑ Grandfather (8)
- ❑ Other (9)

Q5 Please indicate what language you speak most often in your home:

Q6 What is your gender?
- ❍ Female (1)
- ❍ Male (2)

Q7 When you think about your child's experiences in school, what things do you like?

Q8 Briefly describe your child's feelings toward school. What does he or she like best? What does he or she not like?

Q9 Please look forward to when your child is in upper elementary school, middle school, and high school. Finish the following sentence with as many ideas as you wish: When I think of my child moving through the grades at school, I look forward to:

Q10 Please write the questions you have about school in this country or questions you have about this school.

Q11 All language learning education in Massachusetts schools has as a goal for each English Language Learning student to learn English well. Parents have four options. Which options did you learn about when you registered your child for school? Check all that apply:

- ❑ Sheltered English Immersion – instruction only in English with specialized methods (1)
- ❑ Two-Way instruction in two languages for at least 6 yrs. – with grade level achievement in both (2)
- ❑ TBE- instruction in two languages for 3 years but the goal is to use the native language to help learn English and grade level academics (3)
- ❑ Opt Out- not receiving language learning education from a given program in the school system (4)

Q12 Did school officials inform you about these options in Spanish?

- ❍ Yes (1)
- ❍ No (2)

Q13 Were you informed about the benefits and drawbacks of each language learning option (Two-Way Instruction, Sheltered English Immersion (SEI), Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE), and Opt out)? Please explain who helped you understand and/or where you received the information.

Q14 Were you informed in Spanish about the benefits and drawbacks of each language learning option?

- ❍ Yes (1)
- ❍ No (2)

Q15 How well do you understand the following details regarding school?

| | Understand Well (1) | Understand Enough (2) | Wish I Understood More (3) | Don't Understand at All (4) | I Don't Need to Understand This (5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The School Calendar (1) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| The role of the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) (2) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| The school's daily schedule (3) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| The differences between Elementary, Middle and High Schools (4) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| The ways in which your child is evaluated (5) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| the responsibilities of different adults in the school (6) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |

Q16 Space for optional comments to Q15.

Q17 In school, it is important that my child

| | Strongly Agree (1) | Agree (2) | Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) | Disagree (4) | Strongly Disagree (5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| learns academic subjects (1) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| learns to be a good citizen (2) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| learns to get along well with others (3) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| always gives his/her best effort (4) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| reads and writes well in English (5) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| reads and writes well in Spanish (6) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| gets good grades (7) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| learns English (8) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| learns English and Spanish (9) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |

Q18 What is most important for the people at school to understand about your child?

Q19 I want my child to attend a school that develops
- ❍ English Only (1)
- ❍ English and Spanish (2)

Q20 Space for optional comments to Q19.

Q21 From your experience, what is the best indication for you to know if your child is doing well in school? Choose the three that are most important to you.

| | Pick 3 most important (1) |
|---|---|
| my child tells me he/she is doing well (1) | ❑ |
| he/she comes home happy (2) | ❑ |
| the teacher tells me (3) | ❑ |
| my child gets good grades on report cards (4) | ❑ |
| my child does well on tests (5) | ❑ |
| my child has a lot of friends at school (6) | ❑ |
| my child enjoys reading (7) | ❑ |

Q22 What is the best way for the school to communicate with you and your family?

Q23 From the list select the best way for you to complete the statement. During the past month, I have visited the school _____. (Select the number range that applies and do not including picking up or dropping off your child)

❍ 10 or more times (1)
❍ 7-9 times (2)
❍ 4-6 times (3)
❍ 1-3 times (4)
❍ I have not visited the school in the last month other than tonight (5)

Q24 What does the school do to make you feel welcomed at the school? What else could the school do to make you feel welcomed?

Q25 During the past month what are the different reasons you have contacted the school? Please list. (Through notes, email, phone and/or in person).

Q26 When I have a question about something at school, usually the best way for me to get an answer is to

Q27 Select the best way for you to complete the statement.

| | Too Much (1) | Just Enough (2) | Not Enough (3) | Not Sure (4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| People at school encourage me to participate in classroom and school activities (1) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |

Q28 Select the best way for you to complete the statement.

| | Too Hard (1) | Just Right (2) | Too Easy (3) | Not Sure (4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The lessons and assignments my child is doing at school are (1) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| The assignments my child brings home are (2) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |

Q29 Select the best way for you to complete each statement.

| | Very Well (1) | Well Enough (2) | Not Well (3) | Not Sure (4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| People at school understand my child (0) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| People at school understand what I want for my child (1) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |

Q30 Each family supports their child's education differently. What ways do you support your child's education at home?

Q31 I thank you for your participation in this study. Please indicate if you are willing to meet with the researcher for a follow up interview.

❍ Yes, I am willing to be interviewed (1)
❍ No thank you, I would prefer not to be interviewed (2)

Q32 If you are willing to be interviewed, please put your name and contact information in the space below or you may contact me separately (I will hand you a card with my contact information). If you prefer not to be interviewed, your name is optional.

Q33 If you wish to see a summary of the responses from this survey, you may leave your email address or a mailing address in the space below. This is also optional.

## Appendix E

**Questionnaire – Spanish**

Queridos Amigos,¡Saludos! Greetings! Gracias por tomar el tiempo para responder a estas preguntas. Soy un estudiante en el Programa de Doctorado en Liderazgo Educativo Ph.D. de la Universidad de Lesley en Cambridge, Massachusetts. Estoy realizando un estudio. El propósito del estudio es comprender los pensamientos y las expectativas de los padres hispanohablantes acerca de la educación de sus hijos. Sus respuestas a estas preguntas me ayudarán mucho. El título de mi tesis será "Perspectivas y Expectativas de los Padres Nativos de Habla Hispana Sobre la Educación de sus Hijos en una Escuela Primaria de Estados Unidos."Usted puede optar por no participar. Usted también podrá parar en cualquier momento o contestar sólo las preguntas que desea.¡Le agradezco mucho su participación y le doy mis gracias!Saludos cordiales,Sr.Frank RothwellCandidato de DoctoradoUniversidad de Lesley

Q1 CONSENTIMIENTO: Doy mi consentimiento para participar en el estudio descrito anteriormente.
- ❍ Sí (1)
- ❍ No (2)

Q2 ¿Cuántos niños tienen en su familia?

Q3 ¿Cuántos de sus hijos asisten a esta escuela este año?

Q4 Por favor, seleccione todas las que apliquen. ¿Cual es su relación con el niño que asiste a esta escuela?
- ☐ Madre (1)
- ☐ Padre (2)
- ☐ Hermana (3)
- ☐ Hermano (4)
- ☐ Tía (5)
- ☐ Tío (6)
- ☐ Abuela (7)
- ☐ Abuelo (8)
- ☐ Otro (9)

Q5 Por favor, indique cuál es el idioma que se habla principalmente es en su hogar:

Q6 ¿Cuál es su género?
- ❍ Femenino (1)
- ❍ Masculino (2)

Q7 Cuando piensa en las experiencias de su hijo/a en la escuela, ¿cuales son las cosas que le gusta?

Q8 Describa brevemente los sentimientos de su hijo/a hacia la escuela. ¿Qué es lo que mas le gusta a él o ella ? ¿Qué es lo que a él o ella no le gusta?

Q9 Por favor imagínese el futuro cuando su hijo/a está en la grados superiores de la escuela primaria, en escuela media, y en la secundaria. Termine la siguiente frase con tantas ideas como desee:"Cuando pienso en mi hijo/a pasando por los diferentes grados de escuela, anticipo con interés: "

Q10 Por favor, escriba las preguntas que tenga acerca de la escuela en este país o preguntas que tenga acerca de esta escuela?

Q11 Toda la educación en el aprendizaje de idiomas en las escuelas de Massachusetts tiene como meta, para cada estudiante en los varios programas de Aprendizaje del Idioma Inglés, el aprender bien el idioma Inglés. Los padres tienen cuatro opciones. ¿De cuales de estas opciones se enteró Ud. cuando matriculó a su hijo/a para la escuela? Marque todos los que correspondan:

- ❑ El Programa de Inmersión en Inglés Protegido (Sheltered English Imersion) - instrucción sólo en Inglés con métodos especializados (1)
- ❑ La instrucción en Doble Vias - en dos idiomas por 6 años por lo menos- con el logro del nivel de grado en ambas (2)
- ❑ TBE- (Por sus siglas en Ingles, Educación Bilingüe Transicional) La instrucción en dos idiomas durante 3 años, con el objetivo de utilizar la lengua materna para ayudar con los logros académicos al nivel de gradob y aprender inglés. (3)
- ❑ Opt Out (Optar Por No) - Es decir, no recibir la educación en el aprendizaje de idiomas en un determinado programa en el sistema escolar (4)

Q12 ¿Le informaron, en español, los funcionarios escolares sobre estas alternativas?

- ❍ Sí (1)
- ❍ No (2)

Q13 ¿Le informaron acerca de los beneficios y las desventajas de cada opción de aprendizaje del idioma - (Two-Way) o Instrucción Doble Vía, la Inmersión Protegida en Inglés (SEI), Educación Bilingüe Transicional (TBE), y optar por salir? Por favor, explique donde recibió la información y/ó quién le ayudó a entender.

Q14 ¿Le informaron en español sobre los beneficios y las desventajas de cada opción de aprendizaje del idioma?

- ❍ Sí (1)
- ❍ No (2)

Q15 ¿Qué tan bien entiende los siguientes detalles con respecto a la escuela?

| | Entiendo Bien (1) | Comprendo lo suficiente (2) | Ojalá entendíera un poco Más (3) | No entiendo en absoluto (4) | No necesito entender esto (5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| El Calendario Escolar (1) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| El rol de la Organización de Padres y Maestros (PTO) (2) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| Horario diario de la escuela (3) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| Las diferencias entre Escuela Primaria, Intermedia y Secundaria (4) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| Las forma en que su hijo/a es evaluado/a (5) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| Las responsabilidades de los distintos adultos en la escuela (6) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |

Q16 Espacio para comentarios opcionales a la pregunta Q11.

Q17 En la escuela, espero que mi hijo/a

| | Totalmente de acuerdoo (1) | Estoy de Acuerdo (2) | Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo (3) | No estoy de acuerdo (4) | Totalmente en desacuerdo (5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| aprenda materias académicas (1) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| aprenda a ser un buen ciudadano (2) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| aprenda a llevarse bien con los demás (3) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| siempre ponga su / su mejor esfuerzo (4) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| lea y escriba bien en Ingles (5) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| lea y escriba bien en Español (6) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| obtenga buenas calificaciones en los exámenes (7) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| aprendea el Inglés (8) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| Aprenda el Inglés y el Español (9) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |

Q18 ¿Qué es lo más importante que la gente en la escuela entiendan acerca de su niño/a?

Q19 Yo deseo que mi hijo/a asista a una escuela que desarrolla
❍ Sólo el Inglés (1)
❍ El Inglés y el Español (2)

Q20 Espacio para comentarios opcionales para la pregunta Q14.

Q21 En su experiencia, ¿cuál es la mejor indicación para saber si a su hijo/a le va bien en la escuela? Elija los tres que le sean a usted los más importantes.

| | Elija los tres más importantes (1) |
|---|---|
| mi hijo/a me dice que a él/ella le va bien (1) | ❑ |
| él/ella llega a casa feliz (2) | ❑ |
| el maestro o la maestra me lo dice (3) | ❑ |
| mi hijo/a obtiene buenas calificaciones en los boletines de calificaciones (4) | ❑ |
| a mi hijo/a le va bien en los exámenes (5) | ❑ |
| mi hijo/a tiene un montón de amigos en la escuela (6) | ❑ |
| mi hijo/a disfruta de la lectura (7) | ❑ |

Q22 ¿Cuál es la mejor manera para que la escuela se comunique con su familia?

Q23 De la lista, seleccione la que mejor completa la declaración para usted.Durante el último mes, he visitado la escuela ___ veces. (Seleccione el rango de los números que aplica sin incluir la dejada/recogida de su hijo/a)

- ❍ 10 o más veces (1)
- ❍ 7-9 veces (2)
- ❍ 4-6 veces (3)
- ❍ 1-3 veces (4)
- ❍ No he visitado la escuela en el último mes, que no sea esta noche (5)

Q24 ¿Qué hace la escuela para que se sienta bienvenido en la escuela? ¿Qué más podría hacer la escuela para que se sienta bienvenido?

Q25 Por favor escriba las diferentes razones por las que Ud. ha contactado a la escuela en el último mes (Y sea a través de notas, correo electrónico, teléfono y/o en persona).

Q26 Cuando tengo una pregunta sobre algo en la escuela, la mejor manera para mí obtener una respuesta es

Q27 Seleccione la mejor manera para usted completar la declaración.

| | Demasiado (1) | Justo lo suficiente (2) | No lo suficiente (3) | No estoy seguro (4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| La gente en la escuela me motiva a que participe en las actividades del aula y de la escuela (1) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |

Q28 Seleccione la mejor manera para usted completar la declaración.

| | Muy dificil (1) | Justo dificil suficiente (2) | Demasiado fácil (3) | No estoy seguro (4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| El trabajo de mi hijo/a en la escuela es (1) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| El trabajo que mi hijo/a trae a casa es (2) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |

Q29 Seleccione la mejor manera para usted completar la declaración.

| | Muy bien (1) | Bueno Suficiente (2) | No muy bien (3) | No estoy seguro (4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| La gente en la escuela entienden a mi hijo/a (0) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
| La gente en la escuela a entienden lo que yo quiero para mi hijo/a (1) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |

Q30 Cada familia apoya la educación de sus hijos en diferente maneras. ¿De qué manera apoya usted la educación de su hijo/a en el hogar?

Q31 Le agradezco mucho su participación en este estudio. Por favor, indique si usted está dispuesto a reunirse con el investigador para una entrevista de seguimiento.

❍ Sí, estoy dispuesto a ser entrevistado (1)
❍ No gracias, prefiero no ser entrevistado (2)

Q32 Si usted está dispuesto a ser entrevistado, por favor escriba su nombre y datos de contacto en el espacio de abajo o pueden comunicarse conmigo por separado (Le entregaré una tarjeta con mi información de contacto). Si usted prefiere no ser entrevistado, su nombre es opcional.

Q33 Si Ud. desea ver un resumen de las respuestas de esta encuesta, puede dejar su dirección de correo electrónico o una dirección postal en el espacio de abajo. Esto también es opcional.

These questionnaires were created using Qualtrics software provided by Lesley University. It was translated first using the software and then modified using a human translator.

# Appendix F

## Questionnaire Consent

My name is Franklin D. Rothwell II and I am a student in the Educational Leadership Ph.D. program at Lesley University in Cambridge Massachusetts. I am conducting research on the perspectives of parents of English language learners. I wish to hear your perspectives as parents because I believe you have an understanding of your children and of your child's schooling that is unique and that only you can provide. The title of my dissertation is *Perspectives and Expectations of Native Spanish-Speaking Parents About Their Children's Education in an American Elementary School.* I am seeking parents to voluntarily be participants in my research.

There are two parts to my research, a questionnaire (available today at this meeting at [redacted]) and at a later date I will be conducting interviews with participants in a setting that is convenient to the person being interviewed. The attached questionnaire is the first part of my research. After reviewing the data I collect from the questionnaire, I will do part II of my research by conducting follow up interviews with 10 – 15 willing participants. Please indicate below if you are willing to meet with me at a later date to be interviewed. The confidentiality of all participants is guaranteed. No names of students or parents will be used. All raw data collected will be destroyed upon the conclusion of this study. The questionnaire should take no more than 20 minutes to complete. If selected for an interview, the interview should not take more than 30 minutes. I estimate approximately 30 parents will participate in the research study. I anticipate this research will conclude by the summer of 2015.

Participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right drop out at any time. You may skip questions. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to remain anonymous. If you elect to remain anonymous, we will keep your records private and confidential **to the extent allowed by law**. We will use numerical identifiers rather than your name on study records. Your name and other facts that might identify you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The responses you give on this questionnaire will in no way be attached to any demographic information you provide. If for some reason you do not wish to remain anonymous, you may specifically authorize the use of material that would identify you as a subject in the experiment.

If you would like to learn more about this research project, please contact me by email rothwell@lesley.edu or by phone (508)989-3210. Additionally, my senior advisor at Lesley University is Dr. Paul Naso. He may be reached by email pnaso@lesley.edu or by phone (617) 349-8284. Information on Lesley University policy and procedure for research involving human subjects can be obtained from Robyn Flaum Cruz, Ph.D., rcruz@lesley.edu or Terrence Keeney, Ph.D. mailto:tkeeney@lesley.edu, Co-Chairs of the Institutional Review Board or by visiting the Lesley IRB website http://www.lesley.edu/provost/institutional-review-board/. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Sincerely,
Franklin D. Rothwell II

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|
| Date | Researcher's Signature | Print Name |

*For Participants:*
*I am 18 years of age or older. The nature and purpose of this research have been satisfactorily explained to me and I agree to become a participant in the study as described above. I understand that I am free to discontinue participation at any time if I so choose, and that the investigator will gladly answer any questions that arise during the course of the research.*

☐ Please check the box to the left if you are willing to be interviewed at a later date.

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|
| Date | Participant's Signature | Print Name |

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at *irb@lesley.edu*

## Appendix G

**Interview Protocol Questions**

Introduction :
*My name is Frank Rothwell and I am a student in the Educational Leadership Ph.D. program at Lesley University in Cambridge Massachusetts. I am conducting research on the perspectives of parents of English language learners. I wish to hear your perspectives as parents because I believe you have an understanding of your children and of your child's schooling that is unique and that only you can provide. The title of my dissertation is Perspectives and Expectations of Native Spanish-Speaking Parents About Their Children's Education in An American Elementary School. My interview should take approximately 30 minutes. I have some paperwork for you to review and sign. Also, I am asking your permission to audiotape this interview so I may later transcribe your responses for my research.*

1. Where and when did you first enroll your child in public school in the United States?

2. Please tell me about your experience when you first enrolled your child(ren) in the _____public school?
    a. What was the experience?
    b. Did you find the process easy? Difficult?
    c. Did the experience help you understand the American education system better? How was it helpful/not helpful?
    d. Did the people you spoke to say anything or ask anything you did not expect or understand?
        i. If yes, can you tell me about that?
    e. Were there things you thought you would talk about but didn't?
        i. If yes, can you tell me about that?
    f. On the questionnaire, you responded that the school provided an interpreter/did not provide an interpreter. Was it helpful? Please tell me about this experience…

3. In [redacted], parents of English language learners are offered four different options for their child(ren)'s education: SEI (Sheltered English Immersion), TBE (Transitional Bilingual Education), Two-Way Bilingual, and Opt Out.
    a. How did you understand what the different options had to offer? Were the options explained to you in Spanish?
        i. Did you read something about each one?
        ii. Did family members or friends explain the options to you?
        iii. Did you learn about the options from the newspaper, radio, television, on-line?
        iv. What helped you decide?
    b. What did you think when you heard about these different options?
    c. What did you choose?

   d. Why did you choose that option?

4. On the survey, some parents answered that they wanted their child to attend a school that develops both English and Spanish while some others preferred a school that focused on developing English. What are your thoughts about what is best for your child for his/her future wherever your child may eventually live?
   a. (be prepared to say:) I want to understand the reasons you have for your preference.
   b. Is this easy to answer? Difficult to answer? What makes it easy/difficult to answer?
   c. Has your thinking about this changed?

5. You answered on the survey that your child is doing well at school. What are your reasons for saying that?
   a. (only use this if I need to probe for understanding) What have you noticed that makes you feel that way?

6. You responded that the school makes you feel welcome by _____. Can you tell me more about this?

7. When you need to meet with staff at the school, what times are good for you? Why is that a good time or a better time?

8. All English language learners in all grades are required to take the WIDA ACCESS for language learning and the acquisition of English each year. Do you know about this test?
   a. How did you learn about this test?
   b. Based on what you know … what do you think about this test?
   c. How do you feel about it?

9. Beginning in grade 3, all students in Massachusetts are required to take certain statewide tests, either the PARCC or the MCAS. Do you know about these tests?
   a. How did you learn about these tests?
   b. Based on what you know … what do you think about these tests?
   c. How do you feel about them?

10. When you receive reports from the school about your child's performance on MCAS, PARCC, and/or ACCESS, what does that tell you about your child? (I will provide and refer to a sample report of ACCESS and MCAS)

11. Parents will be asked to draw a picture that includes the following: "CHILD," "PARENT," "TEACHER," "FAMILY," "SCHOOL." They will have the option of drawing it on 11 X 14 paper with markers or on an 11 X 14 whiteboard with markers. I will ask the parent to draw a picture of schooling from their native country that shows all five categories. Additionally, I will have each category listed in a clear plastic stand on the table for them to refer to. When they are done:

    Script: "I would like you to think about the following topics child, parent, teacher, family and school. You can see here I have each listed in this clear stand in both Spanish and English.
    I am going to invite you to draw two separate pictures using these topics (point to clear stand), the first one will be about schooling in your native country, the second will be about schooling here in the United States. I would like you to draw me a picture that includes each of these with regards to schooling in your native country. You may use 11 X 14 white paper or an 11 X 14 whiteboard. I have different colored markers for you to use."

    *When indicate that they are finished …*

    a. Please describe what you came up with.
    b. Is there anything else you would like to put in the picture that would really help show what schooling is like in your country?
    c. How do these all work together? Can you tell me how they are connected?
    d. IF NO RESPONSE: "Can you use lines or arrows to show how they are connected?"

12. I will then repeat the process with the same option of an 11 X 14 sheet of paper or a different 11 X 14 whiteboard and ask them to do the same for the school their children presently are attending.

    Script: "Now I would like you to do the same thing, using the same topics but instead, I would like you to draw a picture with regards to the school your children are presently attending."

    a. Please describe what you came up with.
    b. If you were to draw any arrows, what would you connect with arrows?
    c. Is there anything additional you would like to put in the picture that would really help show what schooling is like right now?
    d. How do these all work together?

13. I will ask them if they want to make any observations about the two drawings.
    a. Are there any differences between the school experience in your native country and the school experience in this country they would like to tell me about?
    b. Can you explain how these experiences are similar?

14. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your child(ren) attending school in America? Is there anything else about that experience that will be important for me to know?

15. When you think about your child(ren) grown up and out of school, what would you like to see them doing when they are adults?

## Appendix H

**Interview Prop**

| | |
|---|---|
| ***Family*** | ***Familia*** |
| ***Child*** | ***Niño*** |
| ***School*** | ***Escuela*** |
| ***Mother and/or Father*** | ***Madre y/o Padre*** |
| ***Teacher*** | ***Maestro*** |

# Appendix I

## Interview Consent

My name is Franklin D. Rothwell II and I am a student in the Educational Leadership Ph.D. program at Lesley University in Cambridge Massachusetts. I am conducting research on the perspectives of parents of English language learners. I wish to hear your perspectives as parents because I believe you have an understanding of your children and of your child's schooling that is unique and that only you can provide. The title of my dissertation is *Perspectives and Expectations of Native Spanish-Speaking Parents About Their Children's Education in An American Elementary School.* I am seeking parents to voluntarily be participants in my research.

There are two parts to my research, a questionnaire (completed last spring) and the interview, which I am presently conducting here today. The confidentiality of all participants is guaranteed. No names of students or parents will be used. All raw data collected will be destroyed upon the conclusion of this study. The interview should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right drop out at any time. You may skip questions. Whatever you decide, you will still receive the gift for participating.

You have the right to remain anonymous. If you elect to remain anonymous, we will keep your records private and confidential **to the extent allowed by law**. We will use numerical identifiers rather than your name on study records. Your name and other facts that might identify you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The responses you give on this questionnaire will in no way be attached to any demographic information you provide. If for some reason, you do not wish to remain anonymous, you may specifically authorize the use of material that would identify you as a subject in the experiment.

If you would like to learn more about this research project, please contact me by email rothwell@lesley.edu or by phone (508)989-3210. Additionally, my senior advisor at Lesley University is Dr. Paul Naso. He may be reached by email pnaso@lesley.edu or by phone (617) 349-8284. Information on Lesley University policy and procedure for research involving human subjects can be obtained from Robyn Flaum Cruz, Ph.D., rcruz@lesley.edu or Terrence Keeney, Ph.D. mailto:tkeeney@lesley.edu, Co-Chairs of the Institutional Review Board or by visiting the Lesley IRB website http://www.lesley.edu/provost/institutional-review-board/. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Sincerely,

Franklin D. Rothwell II

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|
| Date | Researcher's Signature | Print Name |

*For Participants:*
*I am 18 years of age or older. The nature and purpose of this research have been satisfactorily explained to me and I agree to become a participant in the study as described above. I understand that I am free to discontinue participation at any time if I so choose, and that the investigator will gladly answer any questions that arise during the course of the research.*

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|
| Date | Participant's Signature | Print Name |

*There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu.*

## Appendix J

### Pilot Interview Protocol

Introduction:

1. Tell me about your experience when you first enrolled your child(ren) in the public school?
    a. How was the experience?
    b. Were there things that you were asked that you did not anticipate them asking?
        i. If yes, can you tell me about those?
    c. Were there things you thought they would ask and they did not?
        i. If yes, can you tell me about those?

2. The Framingham Public Schools offers parents of English language learners four different options for their schooling: SEI, TBE, Two-Way Bilingual, and Opt Out.
    a. Can you walk me through how you learned about these different programs?
    b. Did you feel as though each program/option and the benefits of each were explained well? Explain why you think this way.
    c. Were the options explained to you in Spanish?

3. On the survey, some parents indicated that they wanted their child to attend a school that develops both English and Spanish while some others preferred a school that focused on developing English. Which situation would you prefer for your child?
    a. What factors contribute to your thinking this way?

4. Explain how you know your child is doing well at school.

5. What do children need to succeed at school? What does your child need?

6. If for some reason the school was NOT meeting your child's needs, what would you do?
    *(some possible follow up questions)*
    a. Can you describe the progressive steps you might take with the school?
    b. Can you give an example where the school came up short in meeting your or your child's needs and what you did as a result?

7. Parents shared with us several different ways they support their child's education. How do you support your child's schooling?
    *(possible follow up questions)*
    a. prompting questions re: routines, reading, quiet spaces, parental assistance.

8. What do you think is your child's biggest struggle at school?
    a. What comes easily for him/her?
    b. What is most important for the people at school to understand about your child?

9. Over the past several years, there has been a push from the federal and state government with regards to testing. In Massachusetts, we have used the MCAS and most recently the new PARCC test. What are your feelings about these statewide tests?
   *(possible follow up questions)*
   a. If your child does well, will that be an indication they are doing well in school or are there other indicators you prefer to use? If there are, what are they?
   b. If your child does poorly on these tests, what does that mean?
   c. Do you think these tests and their results can lead to a better experience for your child at school?

10. How would you describe your involvement with your child's schooling? Explain.

## Appendix K

### Epstein's four principals of the sociology of education

*Parental involvement requires multilevel leadership.* The NCLB requires states, districts, and schools to develop and implement policies and plans to reach all families. Districts must provide professional development to build educators' and parents' capacities to understand partnerships and help schools develop goal-oriented partnership programs. State departments of education must disseminate effective partnership practices and review districts' plans. These and other requirements redirect state and district leaders from monitoring for compliance to actively helping schools improve the quality and results of partnership programs.

*Parental involvement is a component of school and classroom organization.* Every school that receives Title I funds must implement a program to involve all parents in ways that support students' achievement and success in school. By requiring plans and practices that contribute to students' learning, the NCLB identifies parental involvement as an essential component of school improvement, linked to the curriculum, instruction, assessments, and other aspects of school management.

*Parental involvement recognizes the shared responsibilities of educators and families for children's learning and success in school.* Section 1118 and other sections (1111–19) call for educators and parents to share information and decisions about the quality of schools, students' placements, and improving programs of family involvement. Educators must communicate with all parents about their children's scores on achievement tests, comparisons, and trends of test scores for all schools in a district and major subgroups of students, and other indicators (e.g., attendance, graduation rates, teachers' qualifications). In underperforming or persistently dangerous schools, parents must have information on and options to change to more successful schools or to select supplemental educational services for eligible children. In effect, the law activates the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which posits that students learn more and better when the home, school, and community share responsibilities for their success, and includes examples of the six types of involvement (*parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community*) to show how to engage families at school and at home (Epstein 2001; Epstein et al. 2002).

*Parental involvement programs must include all families, even those who are not currently involved, not just the easiest to reach.* Two main goals of the sociology of education are to understand inequalities in education and to design and test programs that yield more equal educational opportunities. Equity is also the stated goal of the NCLB's requirements for family involvement. The law repeatedly stresses that communications with parents must be clear, useful, and in languages that all parents can understand.

## Glossary

**ACCESS** tests are assessments that meet the federal and state laws requiring that English learners (ELs) be assessed annually to measure their proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking English, as well as the progress they are making in learning English.

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)** is the key measure in determining whether a public school or school district is making "annual progress" towards the academic goals established by each state.

**Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO)** are English proficiency assessments that each state must give to English learners annually to track the attainment of English. In Massachusetts, this is the ACCESS tests.

**English Language Development (ELD)** typically refers to a program or curriculum to teach English learners English.

**English learners (EL)** when used with respect to an individual, means an individual—
(A) who is aged 3 through 21;
(B) who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school;
(C) (i) who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English;
(ii) (I) who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and
(II) who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency; or
(iii) who is migratory, whose native language is a language other than English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and
(D) whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual—
(i) the ability to meet the challenging State academic standards;
(ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or
(iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society.
Taken from (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

**English Proficient** is the way in which students in an ELD program get relabeled once they show proficiency on a state annual measurable achievement objectives (AMAO) English proficiency assessment.

**High-Needs Students** in Massachusetts refers to all students in a school or district belonging to at least one of the following individual subgroups: students with disabilities, English learners and former English learners, or low-income students (eligible for free/reduced price school lunch).

**Limited English Proficient (LEP)** is the moniker given to an English learner who has yet to show proficiency either by an entrance assessment or through a yearly AMAO.

**Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)** is designed to meet the requirements of the Education Reform Law of 1993. This law specifies that the testing program must:

- test all public school students in Massachusetts, including students with disabilities and English learners;
- measure performance based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework learning standards; and
- report on the performance of individual students, schools, and districts.

The MCAS program is used to hold schools and districts accountable for the progress they have made annually toward the objective of the No Child Left Behind Law that all students be proficient in Reading and Mathematics by 2014 (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, 2014).

**Opt-outs** are students who qualify for bilingual education services but whose parents choose to deny said services. These students still need to be tracked and their progress reported by bilingual department leaders for state and national data collection on English learners.

**Parent Involvement** is defined for the first time by the United States Department of Education in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB Act) reauthorizing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) as "the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring:

- that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning;
- that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school;
- that parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and
- that other activities are carried out, such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA (Parental Involvement). (Department of Education, 2004).

**Parent Engagement** tends to be defined through a juxtaposition with parent involvement. Ferlazzo and Hammond (2009) explain that engagement occurs by having schools strategically *engage* parents opposed to simply *involving* parents. Engagement is more of a philosophy to view parents' roles differently and to view them as true partners in their children's education. Schools that engage parents "assist them in developing and harnessing their own energy" (p. 2) as they gain voice and social capital in the decisions made at the school.

**PARCC** stands for **t**he Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers which refers to a group of states working together to develop a set of assessments that measure whether students are on track to be successful in college and careers. In some school systems in Massachusetts for several years, schools took these assessments instead of the MCAS assessments. All schools in Massachusetts returned to MCAS testing in the school year 2016 – 2017.

**Sheltered English Immersion (SEI)** is a program where ELs are taught content in English and the educator is supposed to "shelter" the content in ways that show knowledge of best practices

for instructing ELs as well as a cultural sensitivity to ELs. In some parts of the United States, SEI may denote to *Sheltered English Instruction* which refers to the same conceptual framework.

**Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE)** is a program for English learners where the content instruction is given to the students in their native language while students concurrently receive ELD instruction to learn English. Once the student shows proficiency in academic English through an annual measurable achievement objectives English proficiency assessment, the student is moved into an English instructional setting, usually sheltered English immersion (SEI).

**Two-Way Bilingual** is a bilingual program in which students develop language proficiency in two languages by receiving instruction in English and another language. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2017, p. 34)